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ENGLISH MEN OF LETTERS

JANE AUSTEN

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ENGLISH MEN OF LETTERS

JANE AUSTEN

BY

FRANCIS WARRE CORNISH
LATE FELLOW OF KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

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THE CLOISTERS,
ETON COLLEGE, 1913.

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PRINCIPAL DATES OF JANE AUSTEN'S LIFE[1]

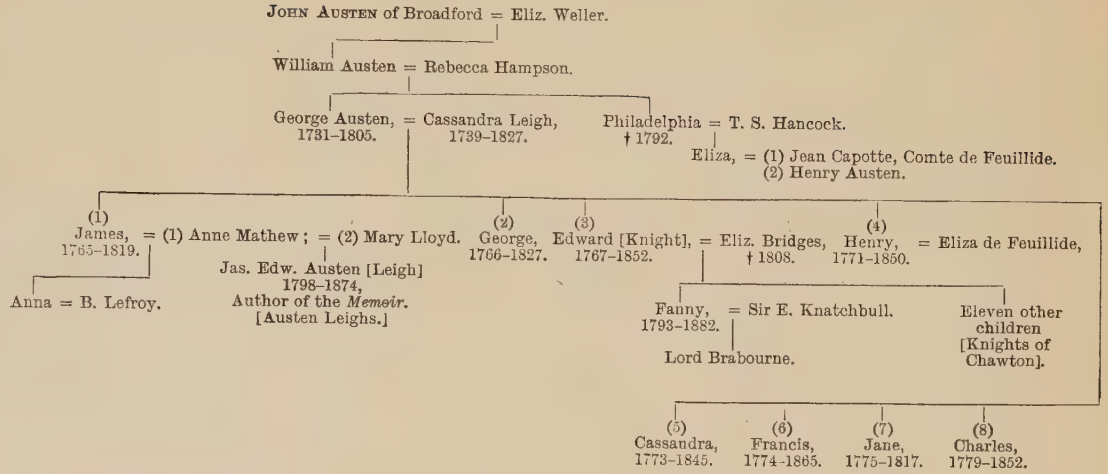
1773	Birth of Cassandra Austen.
1775, Dec. 16 .	Birth of Jane Austen at Steventon.
1783	Illness at Southampton.
1784	Jane and Cassandra at Mrs. Latournelle's School at Reading.
1786	Eliza Comtesse de Feuillide came to England.
1788	Francis Austen went to sea.
1791	Edward Austen married Elizabeth Bridges.
1794, Feb. . .	Comte de Feuillide guillotined.
1795 (?) . . .	Cassandra engaged to Thomas Fowle.
1795–6 . . .	Tom Lefroy at Ashe.
1796	*First Impressions* (*Pride and Prejudice*) begun.
1797, Feb. . .	Thomas Fowle died of fever in the West Indies.
Nov. . .	Jane, with her mother and sister, went to Bath.
	First Impressions refused by Cadell.
	Sense and Sensibility (already sketched in *Elinor and Marianne*) begun.
Dec. . .	Henry Austen married Eliza de Feuillide.
1798, Aug. . .	Mrs. Knight gave up Godmersham to the Edward Austens. Jane's first visit there.
	First draft of *Northanger Abbey* begun.

[1] Abridged from *Jane Austen: Her Life and Letters*, pp. xiii, xiv; by kind permission from the Authors.

1799, May . .	At Bath with the Edward Austens.
1801, May . .	The family move from Steventon to Bath. Visit to Sidmouth. Possible date of Jane's romance in the West of England.
1802	At Dawlish and Teignmouth.
1803	*Northanger Abbey* (called *Susan*) revised, and sold to Crosby of London.
1804	Probable date of *The Watsons.*
Sept. . .	At Lyme.
1805, Jan. . .	Death of Jane's father at Bath.
1807, March. .	Austens take a house in Castle Square, Southampton.
1808, Oct. . .	Death of Mrs. Edward Austen.
1809, July . .	Austens move to Chawton Cottage.
1811, Oct. . .	*Sense and Sensibility* published.
1813, Jan. . .	Publication of *Pride and Prejudice.*
April . .	Death of Mrs. Henry Austen (Eliza).
Sept. . .	Second Edition of *Sense and Sensibility.*
1814, Jan. . .	*Emma* begun.
May . .	*Mansfield Park* published.
1815, March .	*Emma* finished.
Oct. . .	Illness of Henry Austen. Jane's correspondence with Dr. Clarke.
Dec. . .	Publication of *Emma.*
1816, March. .	Bankruptcy of Henry Austen.
May . .	Jane and Cassandra at Kintbury and Cheltenham.
July . .	*Persuasion* finished.
Aug. . .	End of *Persuasion* rewritten.
1817, Jan. . .	*Sanditon* begun.
May 24 .	Jane moved to Winchester.
July 18 .	Death.
July 24 .	Burial in Winchester Cathedral.

[The date of *Lady Susan*, an early work, is uncertain.]

GENEALOGICAL TABLE


John Austen of Broadford = Eliz. Weller.
William Austen = Rebecca Hampson.
George Austen, 1731–1805. = Cassandra Leigh, 1739–1827.
Philadelphia † 1792. = T. S. Hancock.
Eliza, = (1) Jean Capotte, Comte de Feuillide. (2) Henry Austen.
(1) James, 1765–1819. = (1) Anne Mathew; = (2) Mary Lloyd.
Anna = B. Lefroy.
Jas. Edw. Austen [Leigh] 1798–1874, Author of the Memoir. [Austen Leighs.]
(2) George, 1766–1827.
(3) Edward [Knight], 1767–1852. = Eliz. Bridges, † 1808.
(4) Henry, 1771–1850. = Eliza de Feuillide,
Fanny, 1793–1882. = Sir E. Knatchbull.
Lord Brabourne.
Eleven other children [Knights of Chawton].
(5) Cassandra, 1773–1845.
(6) Francis, 1774–1865.
(7) Jane, 1775–1817.
(8) Charles, 1779–1852.

NOTE

THE following explanation is necessary as regards references to editions of the Novels and other works cited throughout the volume :—

Emma, I. vii. (vii.). The first reference (I. vii.) is to Bentley's edition in three volumes (1885), the second (vii.) to the edition published by Dent in *Everyman's Library*. The first editions of the novels have also been compared.

References from *Lady Susan* and *The Watsons* are to the pages of the *Memoir* (2nd Ed. 1871).

J. E. Austen Leigh's biography is referred to as *Memoir*.

Hubback (J. H. and Edith C.), *Jane Austen's Sailor Brothers*, is referred to as Hubback.

Jane Austen: Her Life and Letters, by W. and R. A. Austen Leigh, is referred to as *Life and Letters*.

JANE AUSTEN

CHAPTER I

BIOGRAPHY

MATERIALS for a biography of Jane Austen are very meagre. Her life was passed in a narrow circle, and there would be little to record if all were known. She lived as the daughter of a country clergyman of moderate means at Steventon in Hampshire, at Bath, Southampton, and Chawton near Alton. She visited friends and relations in Hampshire and Berkshire, and at Godmersham in Kent, and spent some holiday time with her family on different occasions at Lyme Regis, at Teignmouth, Sidmouth, and other seaside places in the west of England. She never went abroad. She was now and then in London with her brothers; but her visits to London were neither frequent nor lengthy, and there is no reason to suppose that they brought her into contact with fashionable or literary society, although her name was beginning to be known, and if she had lived a year or two more would have been famous, since fame such as hers, when it comes to the living, often comes suddenly. She kept no journal—she could be satirical

about journals, as readers of *Northanger Abbey* will remember—or if she did, it has perished. Her nephew, the Rev. James Edward Austen Leigh, who knew her well, collected, with the help of his two sisters, all that could be known in his time, with the exception of a number of her letters to her only sister Cassandra, between two and three years older than herself, to whom she wrote every week or oftener, on the rare occasions when they were parted; for the greater part of her lifetime, from 1775 to 1817, was spent by the two sisters in the same home, with occasional visits to relations. Most of these letters were destroyed by her sister, who, with misjudging piety, burnt all letters written to herself, which in her judgment ought not to be seen by any eye but her own. Her own answers to these, if Jane had preserved them, were also destroyed.

Her nearest relatives (says Mr. Austen Leigh in the postscript to the *Memoir* published by him in 1870) were influenced, I believe, partly by an extreme dislike to publishing private details, and partly by never having assumed that the world would take so strong and abiding an interest in her works as to claim her name as public property.[1]

Twelve years after the publication of Mr. Austen Leigh's *Memoir*, Lord Brabourne, whose mother, Lady Knatchbull, was a daughter of Jane's brother, Edward (Austen) Knight, came into possession of papers belonging to her, on the death of Lady Knatchbull in 1882. Among them (he writes) was

. . . a square box full of letters, folded up carefully in separate packets, each of which was endorsed 'For Lady

[1] Edition of 1883, p. 195.

Knatchbull' in the handwriting of my great-aunt, Cassandra Austen, and with which was a paper endorsed in my mother's handwriting, 'Letters from my dear Aunt Jane Austen, and two from Aunt Cassandra after her decease,' which paper contained letters written to my mother herself.[1]

The date of the endorsement was August 1856.

It will always be debated whether it is lawful or not to publish to all the world, for the satisfying of public curiosity and the enriching of publishers, such revelations as the letters of Keats, the Carlyles, and the Brownings. At that time, at any rate, it was not thought right or decent to publish to all the world the most intimate thoughts and feelings of deceased friends. But to preserve is not the same thing as to publish; and to destroy the most interesting of self-revelations is no kindness to a beloved memory. If Cassandra Austen had been less scrupulous or less modest she would have done a kinder office to her sister's memory. But we cannot blame her, and Jane would certainly have praised her for doing as she did; the motive of her action may be understood from the fact of her leaving the letters to the person who knew Jane best, next to herself — 'almost another sister,' she writes to Cassandra,—her beloved niece, Fanny Knight, Lady Knatchbull.

These letters had been mislaid or overlooked, and Mr. Austen Leigh was not able to make use of them for his biography; that they should have been unknown to him is one of those cross accidents which impoverish life and literature, for he was a generation nearer to the writer than her great-nephew, Lord Brabourne, and had

[1] Brabourne, Introduction, pp. x, xi.

a more intimate knowledge of the persons mentioned in her letters, many of whom must have passed altogether out of the memory of Lord Brabourne and his contemporaries. Nor can we well spare the sisterly letters which answered and were answered by those that are collected here.

The letters which Cassandra preserved, ninety-four in number, and written at different periods during the last twenty years of her life, are a very imperfect chronicle. They are concerned, as their editor says, with 'the most ordinary details and most commonplace topics'; and Sir Leslie Stephen did not hesitate to pronounce them 'trivial.'[1] They tell no intimate story of her loves, hopes, joys, and sorrows; and the omission or suppression of serious topics injures her memory. But they are the only personal record; and enough remains to show that they were written by the same comprehensive genius whose intuition and observation created the novels.

Besides these sources of information, a few letters were published by W. & E. Hubback, the authors of *Jane Austen's Sailor Brothers*. Miss Constance Hill has minutely searched the localities with which Jane Austen was connected; finally, whatever further material existed has been accurately examined and arranged, and embodied in Messrs. W. & R. A. Austen Leigh's *Jane Austen's Life and Letters*, which must henceforward be the standard work on the subject.

The *Memoir* appeared early enough to attract objection, if objection were to be made; and recent criticism has not disturbed its reputation for correctness. Even if it

[1] *Dictionary of National Biography.*

is somewhat coloured by affection, that is the right temper for a biographer; and especially in this case, where the subject of the biography is a satirist, and consequently exposed to unkindly interpretation; and Mr. Austen Leigh's direct testimony to the lovable character of his aunt outweighs much irresponsible guessing. Nothing further of importance is to be expected; a few letters, a few notices from papers left by relations and friends, perhaps some fragments of early compositions. The result of the excellent work of Mr. William and Mr. Richard Austen Leigh is to confirm and deepen the impression conveyed by the novels, the letters, and the *Memoir*. We could not wish it otherwise.

Of Jane Austen's parentage and extraction it is enough to say that it has been traced to a family settled at the end of the sixteenth century at Horsmonden in Kent, who carried on business as clothiers, and who acquired wealth in trade, and then position and armorial gentility.

One of these Austens, John, probably the owner of Broadford, Horsmonden, living early in the seventeenth century, had eight sons, the fifth of whom, Francis, was grandfather to John Austen, who married Elizabeth Weller, and died in 1704. Their fourth son, William Austen, born in 1701, married in 1727 a widow, Rebecca Walter, daughter of Sir George Hampson, Bart., and this couple had three children, George Austen, Jane's father, born in 1731, and his two sisters, Leonora, who died unmarried, and Philadelphia, who was sent out to India at the age of twenty-one to find a husband, and

there married a man much older than herself, named Hancock.

It was the custom of the less opulent gentry in all parts of the kingdom to send their sons to grammar schools of good repute in their own neighbourhood. William Austen lived at Tonbridge; his son George was educated as a scholar of Tonbridge School by the kindness of his uncle, Francis Austen, who was a solicitor in the town. He proceeded thence with a 'Smyth' exhibition to St. John's College, Oxford, of which society he became a resident Fellow on the Tonbridge Foundation. He was known at Oxford as 'the handsome Proctor.' In 1758 George Austen was appointed Second Master at Tonbridge School. He was presented in 1761 by a cousin, Mr. Knight of Godmersham, to a family living, the rectory of Steventon, near Overton, in Hampshire, and about the same time his uncle Francis Austen bought for him the next presentation to the neighbouring rectory of Deane, which benefice fell vacant in 1773. He did not reside on his living till after his marriage with Cassandra, daughter of Thomas Leigh, Fellow of All Souls', in April 1764.

George Austen's eldest son, James, born in 1765, was (by his second wife, Mary Lloyd) father of James Edward Austen (afterwards Austen Leigh), the biographer of his Aunt Jane. The second son was an invalid; the third, Edward, who later took the name of Knight, succeeded in 1798 to a large landed property situated at Chawton, near Alton, in Hampshire, and at Godmersham in Kent, left him by a distant cousin of that name. This event no doubt brought the Austens into a larger social circle—from Hartfield and Meryton to

Pemberley and Mansfield, one might say; but Jane's interest was in the people around her, not in their houses and estates, great or small—though she took a humorous pleasure in the prosperity of Kent, where 'everybody is rich.' 'Let me shake off vulgar cares,' she writes, 'and conform to the happy indifference of East Kent wealth.'[1]

Edward Austen (Knight) married Elizabeth, daughter of Sir Brook Bridges, and had many children. His eldest daughter, Fanny, was Jane's favourite niece, and a dear and intimate friend. The fourth son was Henry, born in 1771; Cassandra, born in 1773, came next; then Francis William, who entered the Royal Navy and lived to be G.C.B. and Admiral of the Fleet; the seventh child was Jane, born in 1775; the eighth and last, Charles John, also a sailor, who rose to the rank of Admiral and died in 1852.

We do not know whether Jane had a favourite brother; if any, it would seem to have been Henry; she writes affectionately of all; her numerous sketches and portraits of sailors have been thought to indicate her love for the navy, to which her brothers Frank and Charles belonged. It has often been remarked that she dwells with pleasure on friendships of sisters, and of brothers and sisters. The most signal instance is the mutual affection of William and Fanny Price; but we see it also in the Bennets, Crawfords, Bingleys, Tilneys, and Darcys, and the Dashwood sisters. She writes enthusiastically about the 'unchecked, equal, fearless intercourse with the brother and friend' which sisters may enjoy. 'An advantage this, a strengthener of love, in which even the conjugal tie

[1] Hubback, p. 224.

is beneath the fraternal.'[1] And there may be a sisterly touch in the last words of *Persuasion*:—

> She gloried in being a sailor's wife, but she must pay the tax of quick alarm for belonging to that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance.

Family affection was a strong characteristic of the Austens. They had many advantages to make them content with themselves and each other; good looks, active and well-furnished brains, no little humour, wit and facility of conversation, a good position as a county and clerical family, and a sufficiency of money; a strong cousinry, disposed to be independent and take their own view of neighbours outside their own circle; genial and kindly withal. It would not perhaps be uncharitable to surmise that they did not fully understand how rare a bird had been hatched in their nest; a creature whose wings could not be clipped by rustic associations and country proprieties and precedences, and who could see all the world in a little mirror.

Steventon parsonage was the home of George Austen and his wife and family until 1801. The villages of Deane and Steventon are about a mile apart, and the population of both together amounted to about three hundred souls. The joint income of the two livings, now about £500, was no doubt of considerably larger actual value a hundred and fifty years ago.

The Parsonage, which has since been pulled down, and has given place to a new house built on the opposite slope of the shallow valley, was a small house, with

[1] *Mansfield Park*, II. vi. (xxiv.).

three sitting-rooms and seven bedrooms. It stood in a field sloping north towards the road from Deane to Popham Lane, with gardens and shrubberies behind it; on the south side was a path leading to the parish church, a small Early English building, near which stands an Elizabethan manor-house. The country is of a quiet rural character, well timbered, with elm-bordered field roads ('hedgerows' is the Hampshire name) and clumps of trees marking villages and farm-houses. The surface of the land is gently undulating; it is a grazing country, and there is no great amount of cornland. It has probably changed little in a century and a half, except that thatch has in great measure given way to tile and slate, and that the roads, which are now uniformly good, were then deep and ill-kept like the lanes near Mansfield Park, through which Mrs. Norris dragged the reluctant Lady Bertram to call upon Mrs. Rushworth at Sotherton in winter.[1]

All the novels, and the letters too, are full of complaints of miry ways and the difficulty of walking in winter. Though the sisters considered themselves great walkers they were often kept indoors. The coach roads in most parts of England, kept up by statute labour and turnpike trusts, must have been good, or John Thorpe himself could not have boasted of the exploits performed by his fabulous horse, which no man in England could make go less than ten miles an hour in harness. 'Tie his legs, and he will get on.' Stage-coaches and post-chaises could do long journeys in a day; but the smaller roads and country lanes were mended by the parish authorities when mended at all. Roads are

[1] *Mansfield Park*, II. ii. (xx.).

made to suit the traffic, not traffic to suit the roads ; and a few old men breaking stones by the wayside, and a cart-load of their manufacture pitched here and there in soft places kept the cross-roads open for farm use. We are told by Mr. Austen Leigh that on the occasion of a move by the George Austens from Deane to Steventon a waggon with mattresses and feather-beds to ease the jolting was the only conveyance available for Mrs. Austen.

It is difficult in these days to form a true idea of the sameness of country life a hundred years ago, as it is depicted in Jane Austen's letters. Difficulty of locomotion makes neighbourhoods small, and small neighbourhoods contract interests and create monotonous habits of living. The vacuity of country life a century ago is illustrated by every chapter of Jane Austen's books ; and those who complain that her range of subjects and scenes is small must remember the seclusion of her life in the country, 'where nothing ever happens.' No one can ever have felt more wearily the tedium of 'everyday remarks, dull repetitions, old news, and dreary jokes.' The distractions from small-talk were books of engravings, cabinets of coins and medals, drawers of shells and fossils ; backgammon, cribbage, speculation, and other games of cards ; charades, acrostics, and *bouts-rimés* for the clever ladies ; for the numerous dull, filigree-work, netting and knitting, miles of fringe and acres of carpet-work. The men were little more occupied than the women ; they did not even smoke ; a little shooting, hunting, riding, and driving is mentioned, not much reading. They were never too busy to walk and talk at any hour of the day, to go shopping with the young ladies, or escort them on long journeys in post-chaises.

But narrow as it may have been, this was the life out of which the novels sprang, and no one can deny that there was room in it for human nature to display itself. Dulness may have an advantage in such an atmosphere; but genius cannot be stifled by it, and the emotions can survive, even if the events of every day are as little worthy of being recorded as those which took place at Hartfield and Uppercross, Steventon and Godsmersham. The present generation seeks to enhance life by locomotion;

> . . . navibus atque
> quadrigis petimus bene vivere.

But where there is gain there is loss; and Jane Austen was sent into the world not to compare century with century but to show how true to itself human nature is.

The depth of Steventon leisure is indicated by the fact that Mr. Austen used to read Cowper aloud to his family in the morning. He had, however, some duties besides the care of his small parish, for he took pupils, some of a very tender age; among them Lord Lymington, and a son of Warren Hastings, who was an intimate friend and benefactor of his sister, Philadelphia Hancock.

The George Austens lived at Steventon until 1801, and had eight children born to them, who were successively put out to nurse in the village, according to the custom of the time. They ran about with other village children, sharing their food, amusements, and sicknesses. When, after a year or two spent for the most part in the open air, they came back to their father's house, there was little of the familiarity with older people which is common in our days; children lived apart from their parents and under stricter discipline than now.

Jane's birth was thus announced by her father, writing on the same day, 17th December 1775. After saying that it had been expected for some time, he adds :—

> We have now another girl, a present plaything for her sister Cassy, and a future companion. She is to be Jenny, and it seems to me as if she will be as like Harry as Cassy is to Neddy.

One more child, Charles John, the Admiral, was born in 1779.

Nothing is known of Jane's childhood except that, like the rest of the family, she was put out to nurse from the time she was weaned till she was two years old, and that five or six years later she and her sister Cassandra spent some time with relations at Southampton, where Cassandra and Jane contracted a putrid (*i.e.* typhoid) fever. Jane was dangerously ill.

Notwithstanding this, Mrs. Austen again sent her little girls away from home, this time to the Abbey School at Reading, to be under the care of a Mrs. Latournelle, 'a person of the old school,' as we learn from Mrs. Sherwood, who was a pupil of hers, uneducated but capable. Nothing is recorded of Jane's studies. The most interesting thing about her school-days, we are told, brings out her devotion to Cassandra. She was sent to school only because 'she would have been miserable without her sister.' 'If Cassandra,' said her mother, 'were going to have her head cut off, Jane would insist on sharing her fate.'

As for Jane's home education, it was that of a country gentlewoman, such as could be picked up in a busy family ; on the one side domestic and practical, on the other elegant rather than solid. Education as a

science was then unknown, though the lamp of scientific method, lighted by Rousseau and his teachers, had already been held up by Thomas Day and transmitted to Mrs. Barbauld and Maria Edgeworth. The object of education was to impart knowledge, whether useful or not, not method, unless through the medium of Latin and English grammar.

Jane Austen's idea of a sensible girls' school is given in *Emma*:[1]

> . . . a real, honest, old-fashioned boarding-school, where a reasonable quantity of accomplishments were sold at a reasonable price, and where girls might be sent to be out of the way, and scramble themselves into a little education, without any danger of coming back prodigies.

At more expensive schools, and under 'finishing' governesses at home, girls might learn lists of dates, 'the chronological order of the Kings of England, and of the Roman Emperors as low as Severus, besides a great deal of the heathen mythology, and all the metals, semi-metals, planets, and distinguished philosophers.'[2] Not to be able to put the map of Europe together, not to know the names of the principal rivers in Russia was culpable ignorance; but why it was important to know these things was a question not to be asked. Rich people, like Lady Bertram, put their daughters 'under the care of a governess, with proper masters, and could want no more.' The Austens, with their seven children in a house crowded with pupils as well, could not have devoted much care to the systematic education of their sons and daughters; and Jane probably believed with Dogberry that 'to write and read comes by nature,'

[1] I. iii. (iii.). [2] *Mansfield Park*, I. iii. (iii.).

for (not to go beyond the circle of her own creations) we know that Fanny Price and Catherine Morland, with all their disadvantages, grew up to be well-bred, sensible, and capable women, and that all the advantages of the Bertrams did not prevent Maria and Julia from being conceited and ignorant.

The Miss Bennets in *Pride and Prejudice* were but slenderly furnished in music; they did not draw, no, not one of them.

'Who taught you? Who attended to you? Without a governess you must have been neglected,' says Lady Catherine de Bourgh.

'Compared with some families, I believe we were; but such of us as wished to learn never wanted the means. We were always encouraged to read, and had all the masters that were necessary. Those who chose to be idle certainly might.'[1]

Mrs. Austen, like Mrs. Morland in *Northanger Abbey*, had her time 'much occupied in lying-in and teaching the little ones'; and when Cassandra and Jane ceased to be little ones, they probably learnt to shift for themselves, and to educate and to be educated by their brothers. Both parents were above the average in intellect, and the father was a professed scholar and teacher; and clever brothers and sisters, whilst adding to the family stock of knowledge, exercise each other's wit, and enjoying a free right of mutual criticism, can easily make ignorance appear criminal and ridiculous. That was probably Jane's experience, and she never can have doubted that life is more important than books. In such a family, however, books could not be neglected. 'We were always encouraged to read,' said Elizabeth

[1] *Pride and Prejudice*, I. xxviii. (xxviii.).

Bennet; and Jane's reading, if not wide, was sound. She knew Shakespeare well, but it would not be extravagant to guess that she cared less for Shakespeare as a poet than as a revealer of human nature. She read Goldsmith's *History of England*, and recorded on the pages of her copy her admiration for Mary Queen of Scots and Charles I.[1] She admired Johnson, Cowper, Scott; among the modern poets she praises Crabbe, but with no great enthusiasm. She had no taste for Hannah More and other writers of the Evangelical school. She read *Waverley* under protest, declaring it to be unfair that Scott, being a poet, should write novels, and good novels; but she was conquered. She knew and was both amused and irritated by the fashionable tales of mystery and sentiment, such as Mrs. Radcliffe's and Miss Jane Porter's romances, to satirise which was the original motive of *Northanger Abbey*. But a well-known passage in that book shows that she valued novels as works in which the greatest 'powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusion of wit and humour, are conveyed to the world in the best-chosen language.' 'Let us not desert one another,' she cries; 'we are an injured body.' She admired and praised Miss Burney's novels; she read Fielding; Richardson she knew intimately. Indeed, she owed much to him; though she had none of his tragic depth and pathos, she resembled him in tenderness and humour, and in his power to detect and reveal the secrets of humanity.

Her estimate of her own literary education was

[1] *Life and Letters*, p. 29.

humble enough. She speaks of herself as a woman who 'knows only her mother-tongue and has read little in that. . . . I think I may boast myself to be, with all possible vanity, the most unlearned and uninformed female who ever dared to be an authoress.'[1] She had, however, enough knowledge of French at least to read it easily, and as much Italian as then formed part of a young lady's education. Her acquaintance with French was probably improved by intercourse with her cousin, Eliza Comtesse de Feuillide, who came to England with her mother Philadelphia Hancock, George Austen's sister, when Jane was eleven years old. Of this lady the author of the *Memoir* writes: 'She was a clever woman, and highly accomplished, after the French rather than the English mode.' Her husband, Jean Capotte, Comte de Feuillide, was an officer in the Queen's regiment of Dragoons, and owner of estates in Guienne; and with him she saw the court in the most brilliant days of Marie Antoinette. The de Feuillides spent some time in England during the earlier years of the Revolution, and visited their relations at Steventon. The Count's connexion with England may possibly have brought him under suspicion. He was denounced to the Committee of Public Safety in 1792 on his return to France, in order to escape the penalties incurred by *émigrés*; and compromising facts having been proved against him (among them the concealment or destruction of papers in order to save the life of a royalist friend), he was executed in February 1794. His widow remained in England, and was often at Steventon, a curiously incongruous inmate

[1] Brabourne, ii. 349.

of the quiet rectory; not unwilling to change her estate again, but loth to give up (as she said) 'dear liberty, and dearer flirtation.' Some years later (in 1797) she married her cousin, Captain Henry Austen, Jane's brother, some ten years younger than herself, but even after that event she flirted merrily (like the Miss Bennets and the Miss Watsons) with her 'brother officers,' and especially their colonel, Lord Charles Spencer.

There were theatricals at Steventon during Madame de Feuillide's visits, as at other times before she came to England. The theatre was a barn or the dining-room; and Madame de Feuillide, when present, took a leading part in the performances. It was a family custom, and it is not likely that Jane, though very young, would be left out. But the only tradition of the kind is that at a Twelfth Night party she drew the character of Mrs. Candour in Sheridan's *School for Scandal*, and acted it with spirit.

At the Reading school, or at home, Jane learnt to be an exquisite needlewoman; and this was only part of a general facility and completeness. Everything she touched was done with grace and precision, and told of pains taken as well as natural talent. She played all games of skill better than any one else, spillikins and cup and ball among the number. She drew well, she played the piano, and sang with an agreeable voice, though she held her own musical attainments very cheap,[1] and wrote somewhat slightingly of music, or at least of musical performances. At a party in her brother Henry's house in London, she sat out of the way of hearing too much of the music; but she cared

[1] Biographical Notice, etc., *Northanger Abbey* (1st ed.), p. xi.

enough about music to copy out in her faultless handwriting many pages of songs and other pieces, which are now preserved at Chawton House; and we may perhaps recognise a personal experience when she makes Emma Woodhouse disparage her own playing, because, though she knew what was good, she had never had perseverance enough to attain skill. Like Catherine Morland, 'she could listen to other people's performance with very little fatigue,'[1] but she did not wish to be counted among the performers.

> Even the concert (she writes) will have more than its usual charm for me, as the gardens are large enough for me to get pretty well beyond the reach of its sound.[2]

And again, of a public singer:—

> That she gave me no pleasure is no reflection upon her, nor I hope upon myself, being what Nature made me upon that article.

Much the same is said of Elizabeth Bennet, and of Anne Elliot:—

> She played a great deal better that either of the Miss Musgroves, but having no voice or knowledge of the harp, and no fond parents to sit by and fancy themselves delighted.

This recalls *Lady Susan* and the girl who was not to learn music because she had neither voice for singing nor arm for the harp.

> Her performance was listened to only out of civility or to refresh the others, as she was well aware. She knew that when she played she was giving pleasure only to herself . . . but this was no new sensation . . . in music she had always been alone in the world.[3]

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[1] *Northanger Abbey*, I. ix. (ix.). [2] Brabourne, i. 214
[3] *Persuasion*, I. vi. (vi.).

This passage could not have been written by a wholly unmusical person; and it conveys too strong an impression to have been written at second hand.

Probably she was less indifferent to music than she professed to be: but music to her was an accompaniment to society, an amusement, not a source of independent delight.

> Yes (she writes to her sister), we *will* have a pianoforte, as good a one as can be got for thirty guineas, and I will practise country dances, that we may have some amusement for our nephews and nieces when we have the pleasure of their company.

A subject which is often mentioned in her letters, as well as her novels, is dancing. Dancing was then a more important thing than nowadays, in the country at least, which most of its inhabitants never left, unless now and then to go to the nearest seaside place, or to spend a few weeks at Bath, Cheltenham, or whatever might be the neighbouring Spa. Dinner-parties were solid and frequent among people who were within dining distance; the dinner-hour was five o'clock, and even brag and speculation could hardly keep the company awake till an early bedtime. When there was a good-natured lady, like Mrs. Weston in *Emma*, to play country dances, or a fiddler turned up in the servants' hall, as at Mansfield, and half a dozen couples to dance, it was an easy matter to arrange an impromptu ball. More serious affairs than these were the public balls at the county town, which were then more frequent than now and less formal, and private balls (dances we should call them) such as that commanded for Fanny

Price's benefit by Sir Thomas Bertram, who would certainly not have approved anything at all unusual or adventurous.

There is plenty of evidence in her letters that Jane was fond of dancing; and we have her own word for it in *Emma*, her delightful ironical word:—

> It may be possible to do without dancing entirely. Instances have been known of young people passing many, many months successively without being at any ball of any description, and no material injury accrue either to body or mind; but when a beginning is made—when the felicities of rapid motion have once been, though slightly, felt—it must be a very heavy set that does not ask for more.'[1]

As is natural, balls were more frequently attended by the sisters when they were young than when they were less sought as partners, but had not arrived at the station of chaperons.

> We were at a ball on Saturday, I assure you. We dined at Goodnestone, and in the evening danced two country dances and the *Boulangère*.[2]

Again:

> Our ball was very thin, but by no means unpleasant. There were thirty-one people, and only eleven ladies. . . .

She goes on to say that one of her partners, Mr. Calland, 'appeared as usual with his hat in his hand, and stood every now and then behind Catherine and me, to be talked to and abused for not dancing. We teased him, however, into it at last.' It is like

[1] *Emma*, II. xiii. (xxix.).

[2] She writes *Boulanger*; the *Boulangère* was a kind of 'ladies' chain,' an accessory to the country-dance.

the scene in *Pride and Prejudice*, when Bingley cannot prevail upon Darcy to dance; or in *Emma*, when Mr. Knightley was among the standers-by, where he ought not to be.

The sisters' taste for dancing continued beyond the early ballroom age. Jane writes of herself at thirty-three:—

> It was the same room in which we danced fifteen years ago. I thought it all over, and in spite of the shame of being so much older felt with thankfulness that I was quite as happy now as then.[1]

In the novels, also, there is much dancing. It was a favourite artifice with Jane for getting people into conversation, and she excelled in nothing more than in giving the feeling of a crowded room. The dances at Highbury, at Mansfield, at the Rooms in Bath, at Meryton, are instances; and the ballroom scene in *The Watsons* is not the worst of them.

At their home at Steventon Cassandra and Jane shared a bedroom and a 'dressing-room,' which they used as a sitting-room.

> I remember (writes her niece, Anna Lefroy) the common-looking carpet with its chocolate ground, and the painted press with shelves above for books, and Jane's piano, and an oval looking-glass that hung between the windows.

Both the sisters, whose lives were so closely joined, were thought, and no doubt were, good-looking; Jane was the taller of the two. The fullest description of her personal appearance is given in the *Memoir* by Mr. Austen Leigh, who as a boy knew her intimately:—

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[1] Brabourne, ii. 41.

In person she was very attractive ; her figure was rather tall and slender, her step light and firm, and her whole appearance expressive of health and animation. In complexion she was a clear brunette with a rich colour ; she had full round cheeks, with mouth and nose small and well-formed, bright hazel eyes, and brown hair forming natural curls close round her face. If not as regularly handsome as her sister, yet her countenance had a peculiar charm of its own to the eyes of most beholders.[1]

This may be completed by the following, written by her niece, Anna Lefroy :—

The figure tall and slight, but not drooping ; well balanced, as was proved by her quick firm step ; her complexion of that rare sort which seems the particular property of light brunettes ; a mottled skin, not fair, but perfectly clear and healthy ; the fine naturally curling hair, neither light nor dark ; the bright hazel eyes to match, and the rather small but well-shaped nose.[2]

Her brother Henry wrote thus in the Biographical Notice prefixed to *Northanger Abbey* :—

Her features spoke of cheerfulness, sincerity, and benevolence ; her complexion was of the finest texture . . . her voice was sweet ; she delivered herself with fluency and precision ; indeed, she was formed for elegant and rational society, excelling in conversation as much as in composition.

These descriptions are borne out by the best-known portrait, that prefixed to the *Memoir*, which was adapted, with the help of advice from members of the family who had known her well, from a drawing made by Cassandra. The drawing itself is reproduced in Hubback's *Jane Austen's Sailor Brothers*. It shows

[1] Page 82.

[2] *Life and Letters*, p. 240.

a round face with pointed chin, a sharp nose, thin lips curled into a sarcastic smile, arched eyebrows, large eyes, dark and keen; not altogether a pleasing portrait, but it is the work of one who knew every look of her sister; it is, however, drawn by an amateur, and must not be judged as a finished work of art. A third portrait by Zoffany, reproduced by Lord Brabourne, of doubtful authenticity, but accepted by the authors of the *Life and Letters*, is full of promise of character, and might resemble Jane at eighteen much as the Catherine Morland of ten years ago resembled the pretty girl whom Mrs. Allen took to Bath. The eyes are delightful.[1]

Jane did not talk much in general society, and people thought she was taking notes; but the style of her letters sufficiently shows how excellent her intimate talk must have been.

Miss Mitford's unfavourable description, attention to which was drawn by Mr. Austen Leigh in the postscript note to his *Memoir*,[2] has often been quoted. Miss Mitford reports her mother, who had known the Austens before her marriage (but when Jane was no more than eight years old), as having said that 'she was then the prettiest, silliest, most affected, husband-hunting butterfly she ever remembers.'

Miss Mitford goes on to describe her, on the authority of a friend, as

> . . . perpendicular, precise, taciturn, a poker of whom every one is afraid. It must be confessed that this silent observation from such an observer is rather formidable. Most

[1] The arguments for and against authenticity are given in pp. 62, 63 of the *Life and Letters*.

[2] Ed. of 1870, p. 233.

writers are good-humoured chatterers . . . but a wit, a delineator of character, who does not talk, is terrific indeed! After all, I do not know that I can quite vouch for this account. . . .[1]

It appears that Miss Mitford's informant, if indeed she was speaking of the same person, had reason for not being a favourable witness; and it is pleasant to remember that Miss Mitford herself said to Mr. Austen Leigh:—

I would almost cut off one of my hands if it would enable me to write like your aunt with the other.[2]

The 'butterfly' and the 'poker' do not suit well together. But in a case like this it is better to presume that there is some foundation for what is written, and it is not to be supposed that Jane comported herself on all occasions in a perfectly average and matter-of-fact manner, whether for excess or defect. I need only refer to her own letter of January 9, 1796,[3] when she was just turned twenty, in which, writing to Cassandra on her birthday, she says:—

You scold me so much in the nice long letter which I have this moment received from you that I am almost afraid to tell you how my Irish friend and I behaved. Imagine to yourself everything most profligate and shocking in the way of dancing and sitting down together. I *can* expose myself, however, only *once more*, because he leaves the country soon after next Friday, on which day we *are* to have a dance at Ashe after all. He is a very gentlemanlike, good-looking, pleasant young man, I assure you.

Jane is impenitent, and laughing at Cassandra all the time. How should she, to whom all life had its ironical aspect, entirely abstain from irony?

[1] Lestrange's *Miss Mitford*, 1815, iii. 199, 305.
[2] *Memoir*, p. 137. [3] Brabourne, i. 125.

Let me point the moral by a quotation from *Pride and Prejudice*; let Elizabeth Bennet stand for Jane Austen, and Jane Bennet for Cassandra.

'My dearest sister,' says Miss Bennet, 'now *be*, be serious. I want to talk to you very seriously. Let me know everything that I am to know without delay. Will you tell me how long you have loved him?'

'It has been coming on so gradually, that I hardly know when it began. But I believe that I must date it from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley.'[1]

She must have been enough like Elizabeth (who 'loved absurdities') to have sympathised with Mr. Bennet's famous remark—'For what do we live, but to make sport for our neighbours, and to laugh at them in our turn?'[2] She had nothing of Jane Bennet's undiscriminating good-will.

'That is the most unforgiving speech,' says Elizabeth Bennet to her sister Jane, 'that I ever heard you utter. Good girl!'[3]

Of course Jane could not always be prim and reserved. Perfect propriety is a gift reserved to the uninteresting. Of course she played with others, admirers or not, and could keep the frivolous at a distance, and be frivolous with the solemn. Never was woman less matter-of-fact than Jane. Such people might think her a butterfly, and never be the wiser; others apparently took her silence for censoriousness. In a short memoir, written by her brother Henry, which is prefixed to the edition of her works issued in 1832, the following passage occurs :—

[1] *Pride and Prejudice*, III. xxvi. (lix.).
[2] *Ibid.* III. xxiv. (lvii.). [3] *Ibid.* III. xxii. (lv.).

If there be an opinion current in the world that a perfectly amiable temper is not reconcilable to a lively imagination and a keen relish for wit, such an opinion will be rejected for ever by those who had the happiness of knowing Miss Austen. . . . She never uttered a hasty, a silly, or a severe expression. In short, her temper was as polished as her wit.

And her niece, Caroline Austen, the sister of the biographer, bears similar evidence :—

Besides my own impression I have had the testimony of her sisters-in-law,[1] who knew her well and loved her much, that she was not given to ridicule, that she was, in fact, one of the last people in society to be 'afraid of.' I do not suppose she ever in her life said a sharp thing. She was naturally shy, and not given to talk much in company, and people fancied, knowing that she was clever, that she was on the watch for good material for her books from their conversation. Her intimate friends knew how groundless was this apprehension, and felt that it wronged her. She was not at all like Elizabeth Bennet.[2]

I cannot accept so colourless a portrait. I cannot believe that Jane, who wrote so many sharp things, never said one; and her criticism, whether expressed or not, must always have been felt. There never lived a human being with a keener sense of the ridiculous or a greater power of expressing it in satirical language. But a satirist is not always a misanthropist. Satirists may be laughing, weeping, or snarling philosophers, and there is no doubt to which class Jane Austen belonged.

It is an interesting question whether Jane Austen had a love affair. The family tradition affirms this, and there is sufficient evidence to support it, though the details are uncertain.

[1] Mrs. James Austen (Mary Lloyd) and her sister Martha, Mrs. Francis Austen.

[2] MS. letter to Mr. Cholmeley Austen-Leigh.

'My Irish friend'[1] was Tom Lefroy, nephew to Isaac Peter Lefroy, rector of Ashe, near Steventon. The Lefroys were near neighbours and intimate friends of the Steventon family. We know from Jane's own letters that she liked Tom Lefroy, and that he liked her. It seemed as if their liking might have grown into loving. A letter from her niece Caroline gives the family impression of a generation later.

'It was a disappointment,' says her niece Caroline, 'but Mrs. Lefroy sent the gentleman off at the end of a very few weeks, that no more mischief might be done. . . . There was no engagement, and never had been.'

Jane played with the subject as usual in her letters to her sister. She liked him in spite of his wearing a white coat, in imitation of Tom Jones, she supposes. Was she quizzing Tom Lefroy when she alluded to John Thorpe's admiration for Fielding's hero?[2] She rather expects to receive an offer from him in the course of the evening. She shall refuse him, however, 'unless he promises to give away his white coat.'

Tom Lefroy went to Ireland soon after this, and we lose sight of him. But nearly three years later he still appears to have been an object of some interest to Jane. She writes in November 1798[3] that Mrs. Lefroy, Tom's aunt, had been to Steventon, but 'did not once mention his name to *me*, and I was too proud to make any enquiries'; but she understood that he was gone to Ireland, where he was to practise at the Bar; and where he afterwards became Lord Chief Justice of Ireland, and died at the age of ninety-two, never having forgotten his youthful attachment.

[1] See p. 24, *supra*.

[2] *Northanger Abbey*, I. vii. (vii.). [3] Brabourne, i. 164.

Another admirer, who may be not improbably identified with a Mr. Samuel Blackall, Fellow of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, wrote in November 1798 :—

I am very sorry to hear of Mrs. Austen's illness. It would give me particular pleasure to have an opportunity of approving my acquaintance with that family—with a hope of creating to myself a nearer interest. But at present I cannot indulge any expectation of it.[1]

Jane's comment on this letter, naturally not without some slight pique, is as follows :—

This is rational enough ; there is less love and more sense in it than sometimes appeared before, and I am very well satisfied. It will all go on exceedingly well, and decline away in a very reasonable manner. There seems no likelihood of his coming into Hampshire this Christmas, and it is therefore most probable that our indifference will soon be mutual, unless his regard, which appeared to spring from knowing nothing of me at first, is best supported by never seeing me. Mrs. Lefroy made no remarks on the letter, nor did she say anything about him as relative to me. Perhaps she thinks she has said too much already.[1]

If the identification is correct, we have another glimpse of this cautious lover in a letter written by Jane to her brother Frank in July 1813 :—

I wonder whether you happened to see Mr. Blackall's marriage in the papers last January. We did. He was married at Clifton to a Miss Lewis, whose father had been late of Antigua. I should very much like to know what sort of woman she is. He was a piece of perfection—noisy perfection—himself, which I always recollect with regard. We had noticed, a few months before, his succeeding to a college living, the very living which we recollected his talking of, and wishing for ; an exceeding good one, Great Cadbury, in Somersetshire. I could wish Miss Lewis to be of a silent turn and rather ignorant, but naturally intelligent

[1] Brabourne, i. 164.

and wishing to learn, fond of cold veal pies, green tea in the afternoon, and a green window-blind at night.[1]

This ironical description does not exclude the possibility of Mr. Blackall's having paid her some attention twelve years before, but is incompatible with any warm feeling on her part.

Two other traditions have been preserved; one, recorded by Sir Francis Doyle, both improbable and unauthenticated, according to which Jane met in Switzerland a young naval officer, between whom and herself an attachment sprang up. They were to meet again in a few days at Chamonix; but in the meantime the young man overtired himself in walking, caught a fever, and died. The other, preserved in the family, is of a visit near Steventon, an offer of marriage and acceptance, followed by an immediate change of mind and rejection. This took place in 1802. The suitor is described as 'a sensible pleasant man, whose sisters were already her friends.' This is no doubt the affair mentioned in the *Memoir*.[2]

It may be accepted as pretty certain that Jane Austen had one real love passage in her life, and probably about this time; but no exact date is given. Cassandra Austen told her niece Caroline (sister of the biographer) of a gentleman they had met one summer

. . . when they were by the sea (I think she said in Devonshire) . . . who had seemed greatly attracted by my Aunt Jane—I suppose it was an intercourse of some weeks—and that when they had to part . . . he was urgent to know where they would be the next summer, implying or perhaps saying, that he should be there also, wherever it

[1] Hubback, p. 233.

[2] Page 27, 2nd ed.

might be. I can only say the impression left on Aunt Cassandra was that he had fallen in love with Aunt Jane, her sister, and was quite in earnest. Soon afterwards they heard of his death. . . . I am sure she thought him worthy of her sister, from the way she recalled his memory, and also that she did not doubt either that he would have been a successful suitor.

The dates are uncertain, the evidence inconclusive; but it seems highly probable that a severe disappointment in love, and not improbably the death of the lover, took place somewhere near the end of the century, when Jane was staying in the West of England; nor is it unlikely that this sorrow indisposed her to writing, and rendered a period of twelve years unproductive; for between 1798 and 1811, when *Sense and Sensibility* was published, *Northanger Abbey* and *The Watsons* were the only works composed.

It may also be not irrelevant to point out that there are passages in *Persuasion* in which disappointment in love and constancy in disappointment are treated with so much depth of feeling that it is difficult not to read into them a personal note.

We may believe that Jane suffered: we can be sure that she was not heart-broken: does she not herself write, 'It is no creed of mine, as you must be well aware, that such sort of disappointments kill anybody'? I see in her a woman with a natural and wholesome inclination for marriage, too humorous and critical to fall in love easily, but not too fastidious to accept a suitor like Mr. Knightley or Frederick Wentworth, if such a one had chanced to come her way; and I can make no doubt of her having been happy as a wife and mother if she had married.

Her reticence in love scenes and her avoiding all passionate language may be due, not to cynicism, nor inability to rise to heights, nor fastidious taste, but rather to a feeling that passion and death are too sacred for a picture of life such as it was her business to draw as a comedian. Her lovers' conversations, when the word has once been spoken, and the veil drawn aside, are perfect. Emma, Elizabeth, Anne, each is as good as another; but in such scenes as these the keynote is confidence and tenderness, not passion overmastering diffidence. The conversation in *Emma*, exquisite as it is in conception and execution, introduces a touch of comedy in Emma's misunderstanding of Knightley's words, a misunderstanding only removed first by 'the expression of his eyes' and by 'a tone of such sincere, decided, intelligible tenderness as was tolerably convincing' (she is laughing at us even at this supreme moment); and then by 'words which could not be misunderstood.' And when he has had his say, her answer is withheld! 'She spoke then, on being entreated. What did she say? Just what she ought. A lady always does.' In truth it is a comedy situation; two people in love with each other, and each thinking that the other is in love with some one else. It was a stroke of genius to evoke tenderness from such a situation; and how completely it succeeds!

Take the other novels: Darcy is all fire and fury, Willoughby, Wickham, and Elliot are insincere; Edmund Bertram is uninspired; Tilney and Crawford are half in fun; the only declaration at once spirited and tender is Captain Wentworth's—surely written by one who had experience as well as imagination.

Whatever the truth may be, the silence of twelve years is a problem. It may possibly have had a more commonplace origin, disheartenment caused by the insensibility of publishers, combined with feminine diffidence. At that time authorship was not conceded to women. Fanny Burney's coy tremors may sound ridiculous to our ears; but for Jane to have announced herself as an authoress would have been thought indelicate. It was natural, and indeed inevitable, that the secret of authorship should be confided to as few persons as possible; when the books had appeared, authorship could not be long concealed.

'The truth is,' she writes in September 1813, 'that the secret has spread so far as to be scarcely the shadow of a secret now, and that (I believe) whenever the third appears I shall not even attempt to tell lies about it. I shall rather try to make all the money than all the mystery I can of it. People shall pay for their knowledge if I can make them.' [1]

Though Jane's own family admired her work, the *Memoir* describes how—

. . . she was careful that her occupation should not be suspected by servants or visitors or any persons beyond her own family party. She wrote upon small sheets of paper which could easily be put away or covered with a piece of blotting paper. There was between the front door and the offices [at Chawton] a swing door which creaked when it was opened: but she objected to have this little inconvenience remedied, because it gave her notice when any one was coming.[2]

She had no private study. It was noted by one of her nieces that as she sat working in the common sitting-room she 'would sometimes burst out laughing,

[1] Hubback, p. 234. [2] *Memoir*, p. 96.

go to her desk and write something down, and then back to her work again, and say nothing.' Why have we not more of such personal recollections?

It is useless to inquire at what age Jane Austen's innate genius for story-telling began to stir. The only definite piece of information is the advice given by her to a twelve-year-old niece, 'that if I would take her advice I should cease writing till I was sixteen; that she had herself often wished she had read more and written less in the corresponding years of her life." The only specimen of her early writings hitherto published is *The Mystery, An Unfinished Comedy*, which is a very short sketch after the manner of the scene in *The Critic*, in which Sir Christopher Hatton and Sir Walter Raleigh inform each other of facts which it is desirable the audience should know: with this difference, that in *The Mystery*, with much parade of important information, not a single fact is divulged. Other stories and sketches in the vein of burlesque or extravaganza exist in manuscript, or are known by their titles only (the earliest bearing date 1792, when she was sixteen), such as *Evelyn, Kitty or the Bower, Henry and Eliza, Adventures of Mr. Harley.* Every step in the history of such a mind must be interesting. The burlesques and parodies we can spare; but we should have liked the opportunity of reading some of her first essays in construction and character. *Pride and Prejudice* was begun in 1796, after the first draft of *Sense and Sensibility* (entitled *Elinor and Marianne*), as well as *Lady Susan*, wonderful as is the maturity of that somewhat cynical book. It is hardly credible that her

earlier attempts did not reveal the same genius. In point of composition, her first works are little inferior to her latest; the advance is rather in mellowness of feeling and intimate knowledge of character than in style. The letters to her sister, fragmentary as they are, are as witty and brilliant as the novels; we are conscious in both of a mind of extraordinary swiftness and nimbleness, and of the wit which sees unexpected relations instantly, and at once throws them into perfect form, by an instinctive choice of the right words.

As for the publication of her novels, they crept into existence with much difficulty and little publicity. *Sense and Sensibility* was published in 1811; *Pride and Prejudice*, under the title of *First Impressions*, written in 1796, was offered to a London publisher, Cadell, in November 1797, and declined by return of post. It did not appear till 1813; sixteen years had to pass before the success of *Sense and Sensibility* encouraged Jane and her advisers to try the fortunes of *Pride and Prejudice* a second time. *Susan* was written at Steventon in 1798–1799, and ultimately appeared, rewritten or not, in 1818, after the author's death, under the title of *Northanger Abbey*.[1] It was offered for publication and accepted, but not published, in 1803. *The Watsons* dates from 1803 or 1804. Between 1804 and 1809, when *Sense and Sensibility* was resumed, there is no evidence of any composition. *Pride and Prejudice* came out in 1813, *Mansfield Park* in 1814, and *Emma* in

[1] The identity of *Susan* with *Northanger Abbey* is proved by the notice prefixed to the first edition of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, dated 1818, after the author's death. *The Watsons* cannot have been written earlier than 1803, by the evidence of the watermarks on the autograph MS. (*Memoir*, p. 295).

December 1815; *Persuasion* was ready in March 1817, and *Northanger Abbey*, written long before, was under consideration.

There are thus two periods of rapid production, 1795 to 1798, and 1809 to her death in 1817, for she was writing to the last, and an unfinished novel occupied her even when she was too weak to use pen and ink.

To the year 1797 belongs the pathetic love-story of Cassandra Austen, Jane's beloved only sister. She had become engaged in 1795 to a clergyman of nearly her own age, Thomas Fowle, a former pupil of her father at Steventon, and connected with the family by marriage through the Lloyds. Thomas Fowle went out to the West Indies as chaplain to Lord Craven's regiment, and died of fever at San Domingo two years later, within a few weeks of his intended return. Cassandra never married.

In November 1800 the George Austens decided to leave Steventon. There is a family tradition that this resolution was suddenly announced to the daughters, and that Jane fainted away. We read in the *Memoir* that Jane was 'exceedingly unhappy' when she heard what had been resolved upon. She 'had been absent from home when this resolution was taken, and as her father was always rapid both in forming his resolutions and in acting upon them, she had little time to reconcile herself to the change.'[1] It is true that Jane's own remarks on the subject do not show any extreme sensibility. But it is likely that any indications of regret would be suppressed by Cassandra.[2] At any rate

[1] Page 56.

[2] The authors of the *Life and Letters* note that no letters have been preserved from November to January 1800–1, though the sisters were parted during the whole of December (p. 156).

Jane could enter into the feelings of a home-lover, even if she did not fully experience them, as we see from the description of Marianne Dashwood's despair at leaving her home.

'Dear, dear Norland!' said Marianne, as she wandered alone before the house, on the last evening of their being there; 'when shall I cease to regret you!—when learn to feel a home elsewhere!'[1]

Did she write sincerely here, or did she think such sentiment hysterical and Marianne a goose? In either case she may have felt more than she cared to express, and laughed at herself for fainting.

The move to Bath took place in May 1801. The family stayed there, with their relations the Perrots, in their house at Paragon, for some weeks, in the easy hospitable uncritical manner of the time; they found a house in Sydney Place; they enjoyed the liberty of the unbeneficed by spending the summer in the West of England. In subsequent summers they stayed at Dawlish and Teignmouth; at Lyme Regis also in September 1804, little dreaming that this visit was to be more famous than that paid to the same town by the Duke of Monmouth. Miss Constance Hill has with affectionate piety identified every spot in Lyme where Jane or any of her creations could have moved or rested. 'We pass and repass from them to their author as if *all* had equally walked this earth.' As at Lyme, so at Bath, Jane's attention to local details is the delight of devotees. Milsom Street, Camden Place, Rivers Street, Beechen Cliff, Pulteney Street, Laura

[1] *Sense and Sensibility*, I. v. (v.).

Place are all done justice to, her minute characterisation never fails; 'an artist cannot do anything slovenly.'

In December 1804 she was deeply affected by the death, by a fall from her horse, of Mrs. Lefroy of Ashe,[1] her intimate friend, in whose memory she wrote some verses more worthy of preservation for the warm affection which they express than on account of their poetical merit. A few weeks later (21st January 1805) George Austen, her father, died, and two letters written immediately afterwards to her brother Frank bear the news in a somewhat halting and embarrassed style—'closed his virtuous and happy life'—'Heavy as is the blow, we can already feel that a thousand comforts remain to us to soften it'—'Except the restlessness and confusion of high fever, he did not suffer, and he was mercifully spared from knowing that he was about to quit objects so beloved and so fondly cherished as his wife and children ever were. His tenderness as a father who can do justice to?'[2] These and other expressions are so frigid and commonplace from a sister writing to a specially beloved brother that it is difficult to account for them, except by want of feeling, which is impossible, or the convention of the occasion and the age, or the bewilderment of finding that words were inadequate to express strong emotion. It must be allowed that Jane was not always happy in writing letters at times when feeling would rather be silent than speak; complete expression is found in only one of the surviving letters, that written to Cassandra in October 1808, after

[1] Anne, sister of Sir Egerton Brydges of Wotton, the genealogist, and wife of Isaac Peter Lefroy, Rector of Ashe.

[2] Hubback, p. 128.

the death of her sister-in-law, Mrs. Edward Austen,[1] the mother of her niece Fanny Knight, who was, next to her only sister, the person she loved best :—

> We have felt—we do feel—for you all, as you will not need to be told : for you, for Fanny, for Henry, for Lady Bridges, and for dearest Edward, whose loss and whose sufferings seem to make those of every other person nothing. . . .
>
> My dear, dear Fanny—I am so thankful that she has you with her. You will be everything to her ; you will give her all the consolation that human aid can give.

Yet it must be confessed that two days later Jane runs on from such expressions into details of mourning, velvet, bombazine, silk, and crape, gowns, pelisses, cloaks, and bonnets, which even at such a moment were among the interests of life. Letters, however, were at that time not written at a sitting, but added to day after day until they reached the exact weight, and abrupt transitions would naturally take place.

She continues—it shows the simplicity and sincerity of her feeling :—

> That you are ever in our thoughts you will not doubt. I see your mournful party in my mind's eye under every varying circumstance of the day, and in the evening especially figure to myself its sad gloom : the efforts to talk, the frequent summons to melancholy orders and cares, and poor Edward, restless in misery, going from one room to another, and perhaps not seldom upstairs, to see all that remains of his Elizabeth.[2]

Early in 1807 the mother and daughters moved into a house in Castle Square, Southampton, with a large

[1] Elizabeth, daughter of Sir Brook Bridges of Goodnestone.

[2] Brabourne, ii. 24.

garden and a view over the Solent. Here Jane pleased herself in gardening and planting. 'I could not do without a syringa, for the sake of Cowper's line. We talk also of a laburnum.'[1] Here the mother and daughters were joined by Mrs. James Austen's sister, Martha Lloyd, who continued to live with them until after Mrs. George Austen's death in 1827. She subsequently married Jane's brother Francis.

Now and then we get letters from Henry's house in London. She heard Edmund Kean, whom she greatly admired, and Elliston, and just missed Mrs. Siddons in the part of Constance. She visited the Exhibition, and had great amusement among the pictures, but confessed that she found the people more amusing still. She describes a musical party at her brother's house, where Steevens's 'Strike the harp in praise of Bragela,' the 'Red Cross Knight,' and 'Rosabelle' were performed by professional singers, who 'gave great satisfaction by doing what they were paid for, and giving themselves no airs';[2] old echoes from the days of glees and catches before Mendelssohn opened the doors of German music. Wherever they are, the circle is always small, and we observe how little of the world Jane saw on the few occasions when she stayed in London. She lived in London much as Catherine Morland lived in Bath. 'I wish we had some acquaintance in Bath!' said Mrs. Allen, at the beginning and again at the end of her stay there with Catherine; and so Jane Austen

[1] Brabourne, i. 323. See *The Task*, 'The Winter Walk at Noon,' line 149:

> . . . laburnum, rich
> In streaming gold; syringa, ivory pure.

[2] *Ibid.* ii. 92.

may have sighed for more society, she who should have been breakfasting with Rogers and dining at Holland House, and enjoying those feasts of wit which were spread before Maria Edgeworth, Fanny Burney, and Hannah More. And would she not have enjoyed them! For, to use Lady Ritchie's expression, she had 'a natural genius for life.'[1]

In July 1809 another and a final change took place. Edward Austen, who had succeeded to the large estates of a distant cousin, Thomas Knight, situated at Chawton near Alton and Godmersham in Kent, offered his mother the use of a cottage in Chawton village, within half a mile of his own home, Chawton House. To Chawton, then, Mrs. Austen transferred herself, her two daughters, and their friend Martha Lloyd.

Edward Austen lived for the greater part of the year at his larger house at Godmersham, in the valley of the Stour, between Ashford and Canterbury, and occasionally let or lent Chawton House. This is a gabled and stone-mullioned Elizabethan house built on the side of a hill and surrounded by beautiful gardens. It has suffered little from decay or restoration, and in its restful dignity recalls old-fashioned English country life such as Jane Austen knew it; a house large enough to be stately, not so large as to be cumbrous and unleisurely.

The cottage at Chawton is distant about a quarter of a mile from the Great House. It stands at the corner of the village street, and 'near a considerable pond,' at the point where the Winchester and Gosport roads divide, and post-chaises ran by with Winchester boys on their way to and from school, 'full of future heroes,

[1] *A Book of Sibyls*, p. 219.

legislators, fools, and villains';[1] a small white house with a tiled roof, opening directly on the street, and separated from the highroad by a wooden fence and a hornbeam hedge.

There was a large garden behind the house, 'a pleasant irregular mixture of hedgerow and gravel walk and orchard and long grass for mowing.'[2] Gardens change as much as houses, and it is hard at the end of a century to identify the shrubbery walk and the shrubbery border, 'very gay with pinks and sweet-williams, pionies, columbine, and syringa.' Here stood the tree—was it of the Moor Park variety?—on which 'an apricot was detected'; the currant bushes from which wine was made; the mulberry trees of which Jane wrote, 'I will not say your mulberry trees are dead, but I am afraid they are not alive';[3] the row of beech and the young quickset hedge which 'looked very well' in 1811.

The house has been altered, but part of it to the left of the front door remains much as it was, with a side window looking into the garden, at which Jane may have sat to write. Here, as in her other homes, she had no room of her own; she worked in the midst of domestic interruption, and made no complaint or sign of impatience.

The remaining years of her life were spent at Chawton, till within a few weeks of the end. There are no events to record. Brothers and their children came and went. The Great House dined at the Cottage, and the Cottage dined at the Great House. Neighbours, whose very names are dead, visited and were visited. 'They came, and they sat, and they

[1] *Memoir*, p. 152. [2] *Ibid.* p. 81. [3] Brabourne, ii. 107.

went.'[1] Jane's principal occupation was in writing her books and seeing them through the press; we may judge from her letters to Cassandra that she had a clear practical idea of an author's business with publishers and printers, even if her proof-reading was sometimes as careless as Sir Walter Scott's.

Here is a pleasant picture of the family life at Chawton, in a letter written to her brother Frank:—

> In general it must have been a good haymaking season. Edward has got in all his in excellent order. . . . Good encouragement for him to come again, and I really hope he will do so another year. The pleasure to us of having them here is so great that if we were not the best creatures in the world we should not deserve it. We go on in the most comfortable way, very frequently dining together, and always meeting in some part of every day.[2]

Among the indications of Jane's rising fame was the introduction of her name to the Prince Regent. She was informed by one of the Prince's physicians that His Royal Highness was a great admirer of her works, that he read them often, and kept a set in every one of his residences; and a gracious intimation was conveyed through Mr. Clarke, the librarian at Carlton House, that if she had any other novel forthcoming, she was at liberty to dedicate it to His Royal Highness. A dedication was immediately prefixed to *Emma*, which was at that time in the press, and thus the book came out under royal patronage. So far, this notice of her work must have been gratifying and encouraging, for the Prince Regent, besides being the first personage in the kingdom, was a man of taste, and his appreciation of her work was evidently sincere.

[1] Brabourne, ii. 214. [2] Hubback, p. 234.

When Mr. Clarke proceeded to give Jane advice about her work, he left the region of common sense and set foot in the land of absurdity, populated by Collinses. Her correspondence with him contains a criticism on *Emma* (13th May 1815):—

> Whatever may be my wishes for its success, I am strongly haunted with the idea that to those readers who have preferred *Pride and Prejudice* it will appear inferior in wit, and to those who have preferred *Mansfield Park* inferior in good sense.[1]

And when Mr. Clarke, determined to be ridiculous, proposed as a subject 'an historical romance illustrative of the august House of Cobourg,' she wrote in answer:—

> I could no more write a romance than an epic poem. I could not sit down seriously to write a serious romance under any other motive than to save my life; and if it were indispensable for me to keep it up and never relax into laughing at myself or at other people, I am sure I should be hung before I had finished the first chapter.[2]

She had been severely tried by the dangerous illness of her brother Henry in the autumn of 1815, through which she nursed him, and again by his bankruptcy in the following March (1816), by which several members of the family sustained considerable loss. She had suffered from rheumatism and then from bilious fever; and her nerves were in a frail condition. She was also, being in a weak state, greatly agitated by the disappointment of finding that her mother and her family had been passed over in the will of Mr. Leigh Perrot,

[1] *Memoir*, p. 114. Brabourne, ii. 350.
[2] *Ibid.*

her mother's brother. A legacy of a thousand pounds in reversion was left to Jane, but she did not live to receive it.

She writes in December 1815, merrily, but with a suggestion of weakness :—

> I am sorry my mother has been suffering, and am afraid this exquisite weather is too good to agree with her. I enjoy it all over me from top to toe, from right to left, longitudinally, perpendicularly, diagonally; and I cannot but selfishly hope we are to have it last till Christmas—nice, unwholesome, unseasonable, relaxing, close, muggy weather.[1]

In the summer of 1816 she went to Steventon to see her old home once more,[2] but when she visited some friends at Kintbury in Berkshire, it was noticed that she 'went about her old haunts, and recalled old recollections connected with them in a particular manner, as if she did not expect ever to see them again.'[3] She writes to Cassandra in September 1816 :—

> Thank you, my back has scarcely given me any pain for many days. I have an idea that agitation does it as much harm as fatigue, and that I was ill at the time of your going from the very circumstance of your going. I am nursing myself up now into as beautiful a state as I can, because I hear that Dr. White means to call on me before he leaves the country.[4]

Her health, indeed, had been failing for many months. No one was alarmed, no advice was sought beyond that of the local doctors, a family called Lyford, settled in Basingstoke and Winchester, and elsewhere in Hampshire.[5] What the nature of the malady was we do not

[1] Brabourne, ii. 260. [2] *Ibid.* 326. [3] *Memoir*, p. 206.
[4] Brabourne, ii. 264. [5] *Ibid.* i. 172.

know ; at that time it would be called a 'decline.' She writes in March 1817 to her niece Fanny Knight :—[1]

I am got tolerably well again, quite equal to walking about and enjoying the air, and by sitting down and resting a good while between my walks I get exercise enough. . . . I mean to take to riding the donkey.[2]

Many thanks for your kind care for my health; I certainly have not been well for many weeks, and about a week ago I was very poorly. I have had a good deal of fever at times, and indifferent nights ; but I am considerably better now, and am recovering my looks a little, which have been bad enough—black, and white, and every wrong colour. I must not depend upon being ever very blooming again. Sickness is a dangerous indulgence at my time of life.[3]

I took my first ride yesterday, and liked it very much. I found the exercise and everything very pleasant; and I had the advantage of agreeable companions, as Aunt Cassandra and Edward walked by my side.[4]

And in April 1817 :

I live upstairs for the present and am coddled. I am the only one of the party who has been so silly, but a weak body must excuse weak nerves.[5]

Chawton Cottage was small and sparely furnished. There was only one sofa in the drawing-room, and it was observed that Jane would never use this, even in the absence of her mother, who was also in weak health, and for whose use it was reserved, but made shift for herself with a couple of chairs. About this time (April 1817) her brother James wrote :—

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[1] See p. 7. [2] Brabourne, ii. 298. [3] *Ibid.* ii. 300.
[4] *Ibid.* ii. 303. Lord Brabourne dated this letter 1816, incorrectly.
[5] *Memoir*, p. 150.

I was happy to have a good account and written by her own hand in a letter from your Aunt Jane, but all who love, and that is all who know her, must be anxious on her account.[1]

In her enfeebled condition everything fatigued her, even the visit of a nephew.

I enjoyed Edward's company very much, as I said before, and yet I was not sorry when Friday came. It had been a busy week, and I wanted a few days' quiet and exemption from the thought and contrivancy which any sort of company gives.[2]

In her weakness her spirit did not sink.

But I am getting too near complaint (she writes); it has been the appointment of God, however secondary causes may have operated.[3]

Nor did her industry tire. Between January and 17th March 1817, after which date her power of writing, even in pencil, left her, she wrote twelve chapters of a new story, a sketch of which is given in Chap. XIII. of the *Memoir*; and of which it may be said that it gave promise of a rich feast, and is interesting both in itself and as an authentic instance of the manner in which she worked. Within three days of her death she amused herself by writing a poem about St. Swithin and the Winchester races.

It was decided that as a last hope of saving her life, Jane should be taken to Winchester to consult Dr. Lyford, and she was removed there in her brother James's carriage on the 24th of May 1817. She writes from her lodgings in College Street on the 27th to her nephew Edward Austen, the author of the *Memoir*:—

[1] Mrs. Malden, *Jane Austen*, p. 201. [2] Brabourne, ii. 266.
[3] *Memoir*, p. 151.

I continue to get better. . . . Mr. Lyford says he will cure me, and if he fails, I shall draw up a memorial and lay it before the Dean and Chapter, and have no doubt of redress from that pious, learned, and disinterested body. . . . God bless you, my dear Edward. If ever you are ill, may you be as tenderly nursed as I have been.

Another letter, written soon after this, says: –

I will only say further that my dearest sister, my tender, watchful, indefatigable nurse, has not been made ill by her exertions. As to what I owe her, and the anxious affection of all my beloved family, on this occasion, I can only cry over it, and pray God to bless them more and more.[1]

By the end of June her hope of recovery was gone, but not with it her cheerfulness and sweetness of temper, and I cannot do better than conclude this sketch of her life with the words of the *Memoir*:—

She had always sought, as it were by instinct, to promote the happiness of all who came within her influence, and doubtless she had her reward in the peace of mind which was granted her in her last days.[2]

She died at Winchester on the morning of 18th July, and was buried on the 24th in the north aisle of the Cathedral, where a marble slab in the pavement and a cross on the wall of the church mark her resting-place. Her sister describes how from her window she watched the little mournful procession the length of the street. . . . 'Never was human being more sincerely mourned by those who attended her remains, than was this dear creature.'[3]

The general impression which I gain from reading

[1] *Memoir*, pp. 163-5. [2] *Ibid.* p. 165.
[3] Brabourne, ii. 339.

and rereading Jane Austen's novels and what survives of her letters, as well as from the personal notices of her friends, is that of a happy and affectionate temperament, combined with an extraordinary insight into character and motives, a genius of laughter and lighthearted fun, and a half-pitying, half-amused perception of the purblind judgments, sordid aims, and mean actions of the generality. Free from illusion about humanity, she did not condemn or despise it with a cynical sneer; nor on the other hand make use of sentiment to cloak what she saw to be vile. Her love of what is lovable is as clearly expressed as her contempt for what is despicable.

She is as benevolent as she is satirical; she feels, and makes her readers feel, affection for the imperfect creatures of her fancy, her Miss Bateses and Susan Prices as truly, though in a lower degree, as for her Emmas and Elizabeths; she draws with unerring hand the line that separates imperfection from depravity, Mrs. Jennings and Sir Thomas Bertram from Mrs. Norris and the John Dashwoods.

It is to her credit that heartlessness is the only crime for which she had no mercy. Mrs. John Dashwood, Mrs. Ferrars, General Tilney, Maria Bertram, William Elliot, are among the characters who are banished to the lowest pits of her Inferno. Her essential kindliness is shown in no instance better than in that of the Crawfords, whom she cannot part from but in charity, though she does not excuse their faults. There is no misanthropy in her satire, nor can I trace any signs of the weariness and disillusion which middle age may bring with it. At the worst, she only makes a

half-ironical reference to her advancing years—she was thirty-six years old :—

> I depended upon hearing something of the evening from Mr. W. K. (Wyndham Knatchbull), and am very well satisfied with his notice of me—'A pleasing-looking young woman'—that must do; one cannot pretend to anything better now; thankful to have it continued a few years longer![1]

As for philosophy of life, she would have laughed at the idea of her having any.—She was an observer and a learner, not a thinker; too busy taking note of the actual to spend much attention in moralising on the ideal.

If I may quote her most recent critic: 'It was, as she said of Elizabeth Bennet, her business to be satisfied, her temper to be happy. She practised an instinctive self-control as a duty. She was her own clear-sighted, unprejudiced, unafflictive mistress. She knew that social existence consisted for the most part of trivialities, of the follies of the well-intentioned, the infelicities of the discontented, of "a monstrous deal of stupid quizzing and commonplace nonsense," but she viewed and appraised it all against the still background of her own life. . . . She could be happy anywhere. . . . The present authors repudiate the notion that Jane Austen was a stranger to the emotional and romantic side of life, that her experience was shallow and stagnant. The most trying storms in life are those in a teacup. Not all life's heroes rest in Westminster Abbey.'[2]

The subject of Jane Austen's religion has been

[1] Brabourne, ii. 97.

[2] Walter De La Mare on the *Life and Letters* (*Edinburgh Review*, July 1913), pp. 187, 188.

variously treated by critics. Some, as for instance a writer in the *Dublin Review*,[1] see nothing beyond a lukewarm and conventional observance of external duties. He cannot find in her writings 'any trace of her own religious opinion or feelings.' Professor Bradley, on the other hand, speaks of her as one 'whose inmost mind lay in her religion, a religion powerful in her life and not difficult to trace in her novels, but quiet, untheoretical, and rarely openly expressed.'[2] We find that those who knew her best believed her to have been 'a humble believing Christian,' neither hypocrite nor formalist, but one whose life was purified by 'natural piety.' 'I do not venture to speak of her religious principles,' says her nephew, the author of the *Memoir*; 'that is a subject on which she herself was more inclined to *think* and *act* than to talk, and I shall imitate her reserve.'[3] She was a clergyman's daughter, and of a clerical family; but she was not professedly religious, or 'serious,' as the language of the day called it. Her books would have been censured by Hannah More; but I can believe that William Wilberforce may have read and liked them. She says herself, 'I do not like the evangelicals,' but she also says:—

> I am by no means convinced that we ought not all to be evangelicals, and am at least persuaded that they who are so from reason and feeling must be happiest and safest.[4]

Tried by the standard of the *Imitation*, the *Golden*

[1] October 1870. An able and sympathetic article.

[2] *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association*, vol. ii. p. 9.

[3] *Memoir*, p. 94.

[4] Brabourne, ii. 281.

Grove, the *Pensées*, or Wilberforce's *Practical View*, she must be found wanting. She took the tone of the world in which she lived : she is not much shocked at duelling, though she dislikes Sunday travelling; her clergymen are easygoing men of the world—Edmund Bertram is the most serious of them, for he approves, if he does not originate, his father's very proper sentiments as to a clergyman's duty ; but he is in no way distinguished from other young men of his rank in life, and takes part in the ball at Mansfield only two days before his own ordination. But enough is said in *Mansfield Park* to show that the author took religious principle for granted as the foundation of moral conduct. At that time foundations *were* taken for granted—there was consequently less rebellion against, and less fervour for the faith than at the present time, when the 'universal solvent' of criticism has shaken all settled things. The burnt letters may have contained more serious reflection, but Jane was the last of women to speak or write of her inmost feelings : she does not write enthusiastically of patriotism, heroism, or military glory, though she was a contemporary of Nelson and had brothers who shared in his fame; she does not mention Trafalgar, though she had reason to remember it[1]—it would have been out of her vein; she does not digress into tragedy nor even pathos, though she had a near experience of the French Revolution; she only

[1] No letters, however, of this date are extant. Her brother Frank, after joining (on board the *Canopus*) in the chase after Villeneuve to the West Indies and back, missed Trafalgar by a few days, his ship having been detached from the fleet to Gibraltar (Hubback). Her cousin, Eliza de Feuillide, lost her husband by the guillotine in 1794.

mentions the Peninsular War because she knew friends of Sir John Moore. We are not, therefore, to assume her to have been heartless and cynical, incapable of deep and genuine feeling. She was a spectator of life, not an enthusiast animated by celestial visions, nor a philanthropist burning to help humanity. If we are to draw a sharp line of division, and set on the left hand all those professing and practising Christians who do not attain to the standard of saintliness, she must go to the left, and be counted among Wesley's 'almost Christians,' among those whom Newman might set aside as Pharisees or as publicans. But we do dishonour to the Creator if we hold that He rejects the service of all but ascetics, and takes no pleasure in the perpetual sacrifice of a life spent in making others happy, a sweet patience and a sunshiny nature, a temper which 'did not need to be kept under control.' If indeed these 'natural' graces find no favour with God, then we must quarrel with His workmanship, and go on to confine Him in theological bonds of 'covenanted' and 'uncovenanted' mercies.

When Jane Austen died in 1817, the generation of Fielding, Smollett, and Richardson had gone by, the sentimental romantic school was waning, Scott was in full flow, reaching forward from archæology to reality; and the type of novel which held the field, whether romantic, instructive, or humorous, was that which claimed to paint human nature as it is. The number of novel-readers increased enormously, and each generation was more instructed than that which preceded it. The English public, which had made more fuss about Fanny Burney than about Jane Austen, now

learnt to appreciate her work from the writings of a long series of novelists of the first order. Maria Edgeworth began in 1800, Susan Ferrier published *Marriage* in 1818; Scott, Dickens, Disraeli, Bulwer, take us on to the middle of the century; Thackeray, the Brontës, Mrs. Gaskell, Trollope, George Eliot, Mrs. Oliphant, and innumerable successors carry on the tradition. The novel, which had been subject to toleration and patronage, took its place in higher literature, and Jane Austen, who had been neglected by her contemporaries, though she always had enthusiastic admirers, now came to her rights. The first complete edition of her works was published by Richard Bentley in 1833, and there was no further edition till 1892. Since then, editions and books about the novels and their author have been multiplied.

Interest was revived and heightened by the appearance of her nephew's *Memoir* in 1870; and in a less degree by the *Letters* edited by Lord Brabourne in 1884. These two books came out when the reputation of her works was established; but the author's personality was little known. They displayed to the world as a human being a person who had only been guessed at through her writings. Moreover, it was recognised that the analytical psychology of modern novelists was implicitly present there, though long unnoticed. It was discovered that Jane Austen knew as much about mankind as Mrs. Gaskell or George Eliot, and, moreover, was ready to laugh with any one who would. She reveals the familiar unknown. She does not analyse—her insight displays motive without discovering its springs—but she points the way to analysis; her vision of the world around her is independent of changes of fashion, the dresses

under which motives are set off or disguised. Her power of satire is everlastingly fresh. This is what is meant by the common saying that Jane Austen is not 'old-fashioned.' There does not seem to be much danger of her being sent, like so many of the immortals, into the eternal exile of the shelf.

CHAPTER II

LETTERS

THERE is no art of letter-writing which can be reduced to rules. If the style expresses the writer, this is especially true of letter-writing. A generation before Jane Austen, letter-writing was as deliberate and formal as any other branch of literature; but Gibbon and Johnson were among the last of the classical stylists—literature came down from its stilts, and the unstudied ease which was to be brought to perfection by Cowper became the ideal of letter-writing, as the grand or high-romantic style in poetry, drama, and fiction fell out of fashion and 'correctness' and elegance gave way to naturalness. Mrs. Radcliffe and Jane Porter pointed to the past; Jane Austen and Maria Edgeworth to the future; convention on this side, nature on that.

Jane Austen, who knew the pains and pleasures of art, would never have thought of setting by the side of her serious compositions her letters to her sister, full of gowns and caps, balls and country gaieties, neighbourly likes and dislikes. But her flow of ideas, her delicate irony never over-expressed, her ready wit, her whimsical fancies and contrasts, her sense of the ridiculous element in everything, her inexhaustible fountain

of merriment, her vivid interest in persons and daily details, her power of seeing and of expressing what she saw, make her letters delightful reading in spite of the 'triviality' with which they have been charged. Indeed, the triviality of the subject gives a zest to the perfect expression, for she never wrote before the glass nor on ruled lines. As she says of herself :—

> I have now attained the true art of letter-writing, which we are always told is to express on paper exactly what one would say to the same person by word of mouth. I have been talking to you almost as fast as I could the whole of this letter.[1]

Perfect expression is not attained without labour, and Jane Austen had been labouring all her life. She knew what she was saying when she wrote the often-quoted words about 'the little bit (two inches wide) of ivory on which I work with so fine a brush as produces little effect after much labour.' Assiduous and minute labour, joined to an almost unique natural power of detailed and comprehensive vision, enabled her to acquire an inimitable skill in composition. In writing letters, her ideas, brilliant and spontaneous, wanted no editing, but flowed at once on to the paper, for writing to her was as easy and fluent as speech ; and these letters are the talk of sisters who can gossip easily about little things and little people, because their deep feelings are so well known to each other that there is no need to talk about them.

The value of the letters to Cassandra consists in this, that as no journal nor other record of her private life was kept, they are the only contemporary biography

[1] Brabourne, i. 253.

extant. The letters are a commentary upon the novels; and but for their accidental preservation we might not have known that the writer, as Goldwin Smith says, 'is well pleased with life and with herself; that she is affectionate and happy in the love of those around her. There is a great deal about parties, balls, and social enjoyments of every kind, and the writer's heart is in it all.'

Those critics who write as if they thought that a woman of genius ought to conform to one of the usual accredited types do not know what genius is. Jane Austen was not *précieuse* like Miss Seward, nor awe-inspiring like George Eliot, nor oppressively virtuous like Hannah More, nor full of compassion like Mrs. Gaskell, nor stormy like Charlotte Brontë. Undoubtedly her human feelings were not so strong nor so deep as in some of these, her idealism not so high, her religious emotion not so vivid. She rather resembled Madame de Sévigné. She had a natural gaiety of disposition which made it easy for her to be amused and even contented with things and people as she found them. 'I do not think it worth while (she wrote) to wait for enjoyment until there is some real opportunity for it.'[1] It is not a heroic temper, but it sweetens life.

How this tolerance is compatible with so keen a sense of the absurdity of human life and its actors is a problem which I shall not attempt to solve. I think La Fontaine might have understood it, an author with whom in wit, point, humour, and kindly sympathy she has not a little in common. Both knew mankind to be vain, dishonest, cowardly, and selfish, and both loved mankind in spite of all; Terence's *homo sum* was good

[1] Brabourne, i. 202.

doctrine for both, and neither would have wished to live in a world which was too wise and virtuous to have room for laughter. She had no taste for 'pictures of perfection.'[1]

The correspondence between the sisters, so far as it has been preserved, begins in 1796, when Jane was twenty-one, and continued till a little before her death in 1817. Letters are a record of absence; whenever the sisters were parted they wrote to each other every week; but most of their lives was spent in each other's company. There were no secrets between them; but we are not therefore to look for any sharing of mysteries, any exchange of sentiment, any poetical raptures, any discussion of problems. From first to last there is little seriousness and hardly any sentiment; it is the story of an easy cheerful life, little touched by emotion. We must read into the letters the 'little language' of sisterly love, mutual confidence and understanding, otherwise we may be offended by discovering what looks like frivolity, insensibility, or uncharitableness. Sisters, when they 'laugh alone,' do not stand upon propriety; as there is nothing to blush for, there is also nothing to conceal. The keynote is good spirits and enjoyment of the game of life, whether the chess-board is large or small. Satire is prominent, but not ill-nature; irony is plentiful, but of the bantering not the wounding sort; the spirit of fun and merriment animates all. We may wish for more gravity, but the expression of it, we may well believe, would have seemed ridiculous to both sisters, who wrote for each other, not for us, to be in touch, not to moralise.

[1] Brabourne, ii. 300.

In that far-off time neighbourhood was the setting of everything, and neighbours the chief actors. That is why the scope of the letters, as of the novels, is so narrow, though it would be natural enough if so keen a spirit had found these local restraints intolerable, and if so fine a power of satire had turned to bitterness or sourness. But I can see nothing morbid or malevolent in Jane Austen's severity. I would as soon believe Goldsmith to have been a cynic. She did not like everybody, nor pretend to do so. Jane Bennet is not commended for her general benevolence, nor Miss Bates for her 'desultory goodwill,' nor Sir John Middleton for wanting everybody to call on everybody.

I don't want people to be very agreeable (she writes), as it saves me the trouble of liking them a great deal.[1]

I do not see the Miss Mapletons very often, but just as often as I like; we are always very glad to meet, and I do not wish to wear out our satisfaction.[2]

Poor Mrs. Stent, who lived with Mrs. Lloyd, was 'always in the way, unequal to anything and unwelcome to everybody,' and when sitting in the parlour with nothing particular to do and a mind as empty as Mrs. Allen's, would 'now and then ejaculate some wonder about the cocks and hens.'[3] 'His usual nothing-meaning, harmless, heartless civility'[4] is a phrase which cuts deep and ranges wide. Sometimes, it is true, the disproportion between human beings and their fate seems to strike her as comic rather than tragic, and is expressed in language which might be termed cynical or heartless.

Only think of Mrs. Holder being dead! Poor woman,

[1] Brabourne, i. 184.
[2] *Ibid.* i. 222.
[3] *Memoir*, pp. 63, 74.
[4] Brabourne, ii. 83.

she has done the only thing in the world she could possibly do to make one cease to abuse her.[1]

The death of Mrs. W. K. we had seen. I had no idea that anybody liked her, and therefore felt nothing for any survivor, but I am now feeling away on her husband's account, and think he had better marry Miss Sharpe.[2]

Mrs. Hall, of Sherborne, was brought to bed yesterday of a dead child, some weeks before she expected, owing to a fright. I supposed she happened unawares to look at her husband.[3]

Dr. Hall is in such very deep mourning that either his mother, his wife, or himself must be dead.[4]

This is mere nonsense, but nonsense out of place.

She had always made a joke about the poet Crabbe, and said she could fancy herself his wife. He was an abstraction, not a living person. Her mother writes to a niece :—

Aunt Jane desires me to tell you with her love that she has heard some bad news lately, namely, that Mr. Crabbe is going to be married.[5]

Later, she forgot that Crabbe was married, and when she heard of his wife's death, she wrote :—

It is almost ridiculous. Poor woman ! I will comfort him as well as I can, but I don't undertake to be good to her children. She had better not leave any.[6]

We have all shaken our heads over poor Mrs. Musgrove in *Persuasion*, and 'her large fat sighings over the destiny of a son whom alive nobody had cared for'; nor is it much mended by the reflections which follow :—

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[1] Brabourne, ii. 181. [2] *Ibid.* i. 325. [3] *Ibid.* i. 159.
[4] *Ibid.* i. 208. [5] *Temple Bar*, 1883, by Anna [Austen] Lefroy.
[6] Brabourne, ii. 193.

A large bulky figure has as good a right to be in deep affliction as the most graceful set of limbs in the world. But, fair or not fair, there are unbecoming conjunctions, which reason will patronise in vain—which taste cannot tolerate—which ridicule will seize.[1]

I do not defend these passages. I wish they had not been written. They show a want of reverence, perhaps a want of the finest sensibility. They do not argue a cynical or misanthropic spirit; but the last extract suggests that 'taste,' the love of congruity and proportion, the dislike of anything coarse or unseemly, may have occupied too large a share of the writer's sympathies. 'A monopoly of fine shades and nice sentiments' is a dangerous claim; and we do not find in Jane Austen the large-heartedness of George Eliot in writing of commonplace people. Such thoughts, rather whimsical than censorious, may cross the mind and leave no trace; written down thus they seem more deliberate; but they are no more than the thoughtless expression of a passing idea, a flash of wit without malice, a barbless shaft. Every one knows Emma's unkind speech to Miss Bates, and how Mr. Knightley brought it home to her. Is it possible that this little passage was a piece of personal experience, an *amende* for some injury lightly done? I should like to think so. But after all, when these passages are gleaned together and set side by side, they make but a small detraction from the general impression of a kindly though caustic view of life. Jane Austen was a satirist, and a keen one; a comedian, and therefore an observer of contrasts; her generalisations are sometimes severe, but they are

[1] *Persuasion*, I. viii. (viii.).

not unjust, and I know no satirist or comedian into whose criticism of life less ill-nature enters. It would be wholly unfair to pick out sharp things from these sisterly confidences and found on them a theory of general uncharitableness.

Irony is so constant an element in these letters, irony directed towards the writer herself, her correspondent, her relations and neighbours and the world in general, that the reader may not perceive at first how the simplest sentences may have an ironical intention. Thus when she tells how her mother received 'much comfort from a mess of broth and the sight of Mr. Lyford,'[1] who recommended twelve drops of laudanum 'as a composer,' the pictures of Mr. Woodhouse and his daughter Isabella Knightley occur to the mind.

> My mother continues hearty; her appetite and nights are very good, but she sometimes complains of an asthma, a dropsy, water in her chest, and a liver disorder.[2]

We guess the same lady's domestic despotism in the following:—

> I am very grand indeed. I had the dignity of dropping out my mother's laudanum last night. I carry about the keys of the wine and closet, and twice since I began this letter have had orders to give in the kitchen.[3]

She knew well enough that people do not always sympathise with their neighbours' fortunes:—

> The Wylmots being robbed must be an amusing thing to their acquaintance, and I hope it is as much their pleasure as it seems their avocation to be the subjects of general entertainment.[4]
>
> Charles Powlett gave a dance on Thursday, to the great

[1] Brabourne, i. 157.
[2] *Ibid.* i. 180.
[3] *Ibid.* i. 158.
[4] *Ibid.* i. 270.

disturbance of all his neighbours, of course, who you know take a most lively interest in the state of his finances, and live in hopes of his being soon ruined.[1] His wife is discovered to be everything that the neighbourhood would wish her to be, silly and cross as well as extravagant.[2]

That universal communicativeness, which is instanced in Mr. Weston, Miss Bates, and Mrs. Jennings, is thus touched :—

Mr. Richard Harvey is going to be married ; but as it is a great secret, and only known to half the neighbourhood, you must not mention it.[3]

In her view of life, poverty, like that of the Prices in *Mansfield Park*, may be contemptible, and economy is not always admirable :—

Earle (Harwood) and his wife live in the most private manner imaginable at Portsmouth, without keeping a servant of any kind. What a prodigious innate love of virtue she must have, to marry under such circumstances ![4]

People get so horridly poor and economical in this part of the world that I have no patience with them. Kent is the only place for happiness ; everybody is rich there.[5]

Single women have a dreadful propensity for being poor, which is one very strong argument in favour of matrimony.[6]

I will not raise the question, which might be raised, whether humorous personal remarks may not give more pleasure to those who enjoy them than they would give pain if they were overheard, whether there is any place for comedy in life, whether William Wilberforce was right or wrong when for conscience' sake he gave up the art of mimicry, in which he excelled all the wits.

[1] Brabourne, i. 175. [2] *Ibid.* 179. [3] *Ibid.* 140.
[4] *Ibid.* 161. [5] *Ibid.* 181. [6] *Ibid.* ii. 296.

It has been thought that Jane Austen was not a lover of children. She was no indiscriminate lover of children she could see their faults, and divine how they would turn out. The Charles Musgroves in *Persuasion*, the Middletons and Palmers in *Sense and Sensibility*, the younger Prices in *Mansfield Park*, are instances of children ill brought up and therefore disagreeable; and I do not remember any children in the novels who are mentioned with tenderness, unless it be the sick Musgrove child and the little boy in the pretty ballroom scene of *The Watsons*. She complains of her brother Edward's house at Godmersham being crowded by two parties of children at once.[1] She did not like noise, she did not like disorder; and the sincerest worshipper of children must admit that these two evils may sometimes be found in their company. She discriminates here, as always; and the largest share of her benevolence is given to her own children, the numerous girls and boys born to her brothers.

Children are sensitive to the indifference or antipathy of grown-up people; they do not force themselves, like cats, upon people who dislike them. If, then, we find that her nephews and nieces sought 'Aunt Jane' as their best friend and did not find her wanting, she must either have loved them or been a consistent and successful hypocrite. The author of the *Memoir*, who was one of these children, and to whom as a boy some delightful letters were written, speaks of 'the fascination she exercised over children,' finding her 'always kind, sympathising, and amusing,' of her 'sunniness of temper,' 'the happiness of a temper that never required

[1] Brabourne, ii. 181.

to be commanded'; and quotes to the same effect from letters written by two of her nieces.[1] One says:—

As a very little girl I was always creeping up to Aunt Jane and following her whenever I could, in the house and out of it. . . . Her first charm to children was great sweetness of manner. She seemed to love you, and you loved her in return. This was what I felt in my early days. But soon came the delight of her playful talk. She could make everything amusing to a child.

The other:

Aunt Jane was the general favourite with children, her ways with them being so playful, and her long circumstantial stories so delightful. (Stories in which the fairies had all characters of their own.) Ah! if but one of them could be recovered!

She writes of one of her nieces, her brother Frank's daughter Cassandra:—

Our little visitor has just left us, and left us highly pleased with her: she is a nice, natural, open-hearted, affectionate girl, with all the ready civility which one sees in the best children in the present day; so unlike anything I was at her age, that I am often all astonishment and shame.[2]

There is a pretty description of the two nephews from Winchester, sons of Edward Austen, who came to stay with their grandmother at Southampton after their mother's death:—

They behave extremely well in every respect, showing quite as much feeling as one wishes to see, and on every occasion speaking of their father with the liveliest affection.[3]

In the evening we had the Psalms and Litany and a sermon at home, to which they were very attentive; but you will not expect to hear that they did not return to conundrums the moment it *was over*.[4]

[1] *Memoir*, pp. 85, 86.
[2] Brabourne, i. 325.
[3] *Ibid.* ii. 26.
[4] *Ibid.* 29.

The niece who had by far the largest share of Jane's heart was Fanny Knight, her brother Edward's eldest daughter. She writes in 1809, when Fanny was sixteen :—

> You rejoice me by what you say of Fanny. I hope she will not turn good-for-nothing this ever so long. . . . While she gives happiness to those about her she is pretty sure of her own share.[1]

Their intercourse was constant and intimate. In Lady Knatchbull's diary were recorded many 'walks with Aunt Jane,' and 'very interesting conversations,' and 'delicious mornings.' She was, as Jane says, 'almost a sister.'

The following extract, trivial as it is, breathes affection, tenderness, and sympathy with youth in every line. Fanny Knight was now twenty :—

> I am glad you like our caps, but Fanny is out of conceit with hers already; she finds that she has been buying a new cap without having a new pattern, which is true enough. She is rather out of luck to like neither her gown nor her cap, but I do not much mind it, because besides that I like them both myself, I consider it as a thing of course at her time of life—one of the sweet taxes of youth—to choose in a hurry and make bad bargains.[2]

The five precious letters written to Fanny by her aunt in the last two years of her life ought to be printed *in extenso* if printed at all, because they show her on two occasions giving the best of her knowledge of human nature for the benefit of a young friend very dear to her. They are a rare combination of affection and analysis; the truest affection, and a detached analysis that shirks no conclusions; and all illumined by the rarest good sense. From what Fanny had written

[1] Brabourne, ii. 67, 68. [2] *Ibid.* 160.

it was clear, to her aunt at any rate, that the young lady, who had changed her mind about her lover, never was in love with him.

Poor dear Mr. A.! O, dear Fanny, your mistake has been one that thousands of women fall into. He was the *first* young man that attached himself to you. That was the charm, and most powerful it is.[1]

It seems that some slight incident had made Fanny doubt her own feelings.

What strange creatures we are! It seems as if your being secure of him had made you indifferent. . . . My dearest Fanny, I am writing what will not be of the smallest use to you. I am feeling differently every moment, and shall not be able to suggest a single thing that can assist your mind. I could lament in one sentence and laugh in the next.[2]

It was courageous to write what might give offence, if Fanny after all made up her mind to have Mr. A. And lest her expressions of doubt should have too strong an influence she turns round to praise him, and upholds 'the desirableness of your growing in love with him again. I recommend this most strongly.' Then, sincerity and irony at play with each other, she proceeds to describe the ideal lover, whom in some points the real resembled :—

But such a person may not come in your way, or if he does, he may not be the eldest son of a man of fortune, the near relation of your particular friend, and belonging to your own county.[3]

She ends by entreating Fanny to give her lover up at once if she is not sure that she loves him well enough to make up for 'his deficiencies of manner, etc., etc.'

A second letter, written a fortnight later, shows a natural unwillingness to be made the judge of so delicate a question.

[1] Brabourne, ii. 279. [2] *Ibid.* [3] *Ibid.* 280.

I should not be afraid of your marrying him ; with all his worth, you would soon love him enough for the happiness of both ; but I should dread the continuance of this sort of tacit engagement. . . . *You like him well enough to marry, but not well enough to wait.*[1]

If this is cynical, it is cynical after a very gentle sort.

The next letter to Fanny is written two years later, in February 1817, and refers to another lover. It begins with a sentence worthy of Madame de Sévigné :—

You are inimitable, irresistible. You are the delight of my life. Such letters, such entertaining letters as you have lately sent ! such a description of your queer little heart ! such a lovely display of what imagination does ! You are worth your weight in gold, or even in the new silver coinage. I cannot express to you what I have felt in reading your history of yourself—how full of pity and concern and admiration and amusement I have been ! You are the paragon of all that is silly and sensible, commonplace and eccentric, sad and lively, provoking and interesting. Who can keep pace with the fluctuations of your fancy, the capprizios of your taste, the contradictions of your feelings ? You are so odd, and all the time so perfectly natural ! —So peculiar in yourself, and yet so like everybody else ! . . . Oh, what a loss it will be when you are married ! You are too agreeable in your single state—too agreeable as a niece. I shall hate you when your delicious play of mind is all settled down into conjugal and maternal affections. Mr. B. frightens me—he will have you. I see you at the altar. . . . Do not imagine that I have any real objection ; I have rather taken a fancy to him than not, and I like the house for you. I only do not like you should marry anybody. And yet I do wish you to marry very much, because I know you will never be happy till you are ; but the loss of a Fanny Knight will be never made up to me.

While Fanny was still doubting and delaying she writes :—

[1] Brabourne, ii. 287.

To you I shall say, as I have often said before, Do not be in a hurry, the right man will come at last; you will in the course of the next two or three years meet with somebody more generally unexceptionable than any one you have yet known, who will love you as warmly as possible, and who will so completely attract you that you will feel you never really loved before.[1]

One of the indictments against Jane, and by implication Cassandra, is that dress was a prominent subject in their correspondence. Of course it was. Two sisters who have a limited wardrobe and not much money to spend upon it, and who work with their own fingers, who live in a society where small differences are remarked, who wish to look nice, and have a keen sense of what niceness means, must take counsel about dress. Attention to dress means attention to decency. No apologies are due, then, for the frequent references to dress which occur in the letters; rather, we may be grateful for an unconscious but interesting commentary on the fashions of that day; and it is worthy of remark that excessive attention to dress is given in the novels as a characteristic of fools like Mrs. Allen and Mrs. Elton, and fribbles like Isabella Thorpe; though, to be sure, sweet Catherine Morland easily falls into the humour of it.

We see in every page that Jane is no moralist charged with the task of correcting human nature. She would like the people with whom she consorts to be more agreeable, sensible, virtuous, clever, good-looking, and wealthy than they are; she does not lose her temper or her spirits because they are not. She would not like them too good: 'Pictures of perfection, as you know,

[1] Brabourne, ii. 296.

make me sick and wicked.'[1] She was not made to feel, like Dorothea Casaubon, all the troubles of all people. Those who can ascend such heights, and many who cannot, find fault with her for low ideals. They are indignant at her want of indignation. But though Jane Austen did not care to be indignant, I can believe that neighbours, dimly conscious in themselves of meanness, unkindness, selfishness, and the many shapes of folly, might fear a shaft of irony from her, and feel it more effective than anger. The wonder is that high genius in a particular direction, that of seeing, judging, and recording mankind, should be found in company with a gay, contented, Aristippus-like temperament. I am taking my text from the letters; but the moral of the novels—for the satirist is perforce a moralist—is to justify good sense, mutual tolerance, and humour, not less than to show up the consequences of being ridiculous.

The picture that I get from reading Jane Austen's letters, which is borne out by the general tenor of her novels, is a portrait of a woman of extraordinary observation, sagacity, and penetration, and of coolness and rectitude of judgment hardly less uncommon; no optimist, and yet disposed to take a tolerant view of humanity and its aspirations and meannesses, its successes and failures. She took so full an interest in the comedy of life, to which she was admitted not only among the audience but on the stage and behind the scenes, that she was never tired of looking on; and though the design of life showed her jarring colours and ill-drawn patterns, she would not have wished it to be much

[1] Brabourne, ii. 300.

less bizarre than it is; it would be so much the less entertaining. The words I have already quoted: 'For what do we exist but to furnish sport for our fellow-creatures and to laugh at them in our turn?'—are put into the mouth of a selfish though agreeable cynic. They reflect one side of Jane's character; she heartily enjoyed laughing at her fellow-creatures. The other side is shown in her warm family affections, her daily life as reported by those who knew her best, and her faith in moral and religious principle as the foundation of character and action, which is observable, however little prominent, in all her books. She never mounts the pulpit, but she shows the way of happiness and misery by domestic examples. The ill deeds of her villains and the mistakes of her heroes and heroines are set down to 'bad principling'; bad principling keeps some of her lovers apart; her happy lovers meet on a common ground of morals, quite un-Shakespearian in its severity. She follows the lead of Goldsmith and Richardson, not the school of Rousseau and Goethe. She believes in free-will as against necessity, in the power of character to change circumstances, not in the tyranny of external and internal forces and agents.

I wish the serious letters had been preserved as well as the trivial. I cannot doubt that the writer's character would have suffered nothing from further revelation; and many questions would have been answered which now only tantalise curiosity. The five letters to Fanny Knight, in their warmth of affection, good sense, and appreciation of what is important, show what Jane was when she wrote seriously; and the loss of other letters of the same kind is lamentable.

CHAPTER III

'SENSE AND SENSIBILITY'

Sense and Sensibility was begun (or perhaps only sketched) in the form of letters, like *Lady Susan*, and under the title of *Elinor and Marianne*, and in that form is the author's earliest completed work. It was recast in its present form in November 1797, but not published till 1811.

The principal characters in this novel are Mrs. Dashwood, whose husband has just died, a foolish and impulsive but charming woman, her two daughters, Elinor and Marianne, and their lovers.

The scene opens with a conversation showing the ill effects of trusting too much to the good intentions of survivors, especially married survivors, in the matter of testamentary expectations. Mr. Dashwood the elder, whose landed estate of Norland, in Sussex, is settled over his head upon his son by his first wife, is unable to leave to his second wife and her three daughters a larger sum than ten thousand pounds; but he recommends them to the good offices of his heir, their half-brother John Dashwood; who 'promised to do everything in his power to make them comfortable.' His character, slightly disguised by a superficial good nature, is

made up of avarice, selfishness, and subservience to his wife.

Mr. John Dashwood's first proposal was to give a thousand pounds to each of his sisters. Mrs. John Dashwood's ideas of her duty to the widow and her daughters were not as liberal as those of her husband. The conversation is famous, but it is so true to human nature that I cannot refrain from printing part of it once more.

Mr. John Dashwood begins:—

'It was my father's last request to me that I should assist his widow and daughters.'

'He did not know what he was talking of, I dare say; ten to one but he was light-headed at the time. Had he been in his right senses he would not have thought of such a thing as begging you to give away half your fortune from your own child.'

'He did not stipulate for any particular sum, my dear Fanny; he only requested me, in general terms, to assist them, and make their situation more comfortable than it was in his power to do. . . . But as he required the promise, I could not do less than give it; at least I thought so at the time. The promise, therefore, was given, and must be performed. Something must be done for them whenever they leave Norland and settle in a new home.'

'Well, then, *let* something be done for them; but *that* something need not be *three* thousand pounds.' . . .

'Perhaps, then, it would be better for all parties if the sum were diminished one-half . . . they can hardly expect more.'

'There is no knowing what *they* may expect,' said the lady; 'but we are not to think of their expectations; the question is, what can you afford to do?'

'Certainly; and I think I may afford to give them five hundred pounds a-piece. As it is, without any addition of mine, they will each have above three thousand pounds on their mother's death: a very comfortable fortune for any young woman.'[1]

[1] I. ii. (ii.).

Once set up, the *diminuendo* is rapid. The five hundred pounds become an annuity, the annuity a present of fifty pounds now and then, the fifty pounds no money at all, but such assistance as might be reasonably expected:

. . . looking out for a comfortable small house for them, helping them to move their things, and sending them presents of fish and game and so forth, whenever they are in season. . . .

'Do but consider, my dear Mr. Dashwood, how excessively comfortable your mother-in-law and her daughters may live on the interest of seven thousand pounds, besides the thousand pounds belonging to each of the girls, which brings them in fifty pounds a year a-piece, and, of course, they will pay their mother for their board out of it. Altogether, they will have five hundred a year amongst them, and what on earth can four women want for more than that? —They will live so cheap! Their housekeeping will be nothing at all. They will have no carriage, no horses, and hardly any servants; they will keep no company, and can have no expenses of any kind! Only conceive how comfortable they will be! Five hundred a year! I am sure I cannot imagine how they will spend half of it; and as to your giving them more, it is quite absurd to think of it. They will be much more able to give *you* something.'[1]

Mrs. Dashwood's lengthened stay at Norlands is further explained by a growing attachment between her eldest daughter Elinor and Edward Ferrars, Mrs. John Dashwood's brother; but at length, by the kindness of a cousin, Sir John Middleton, a home is found at Barton Cottage, near Exeter, for the widow and her three daughters—the eldest of whom, Elinor, is the main prop of the family and the fountain of sense; Marianne, the sweet and generous victim of sensibility; Margaret, who

[1] I. ii. (ii.).

is only thirteen when the story opens, takes little part in the action, and might almost as well have been left out altogether.

Elinor's character is carefully drawn by the author, but with less tender interest than that of Marianne. She is in some degree a study for Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*. She resembles Anne in gentle disposition, upright principles, constancy of feeling, and patient endurance of suffering. The ungracious task of repressing sensibility is thrown upon her, and the necessity of contrast with the impulsiveness of her mother and sisters gives her advice sometimes too much of a monitorial character; it is only the love of each member of the family to the others that gives warmth and colour to a disposition inclined to be too moderate, rational, and critical. Never was the relation of mother and daughters more charmingly pictured than here; the mother's sanguine disposition is in contrast with the sobriety of the daughter, who in all important things is her mother's elder sister; whilst both agree in their devotion to the ill-regulated but delightful Marianne. A modern novelist would have given Marianne a more adventurous experience, would have made her an actor as well as a sufferer, and exposed her inexperience, if not her virtue, to more fiery temptation; but Jane Austen does not deal with fiery temptations, and the virtue of her heroines is as well guarded as it could be in one of Miss Yonge's parsonages. She drew life as she saw it in her quiet Hampshire nook, and did not aim at describing high action and high passion; indeed, the neighbourhood of sublimity at once suggested to her the ridiculous. But she could not have quizzed Marianne's sensibility so deliciously

if she had not had a sympathetic understanding of it, and if there had not been a share of it in her own composition.

Marianne cannot be satisfied with Edward Ferrars as a brother-in-law; he read Cowper in so tame and spiritless a manner that she felt for her sister most severely.

'It would have broke *my* heart, had I loved him, to hear him read with so little sensibility. Mama, the more I know of the world the more I am convinced that I shall never see a man whom I can really love. I require so much! He must have all Edward's virtues, and his person and manners must ornament his goodness with every possible charm.'

'Remember, my love, that you are not seventeen. It is yet too early in life to despair of such happiness. Why should you be less fortunate than your mother? In one circumstance only, my Marianne, may your destiny be different from hers!'[1]

The removal of the Dashwood family to Barton Cottage, near Exeter, introduces new characters—Sir John Middleton, a vacant hospitable sportsman, and his wife, equally vacant, but selfish where he was generous, and cold where he was warm.

He was a blessing to all the juvenile part of the neighbourhood, for in summer he was for ever forming parties to eat cold ham and chicken out of doors, and in winter his private balls were numerous enough for any young lady who was not suffering under the insatiable appetite of fifteen.[2]

It is one of the problems in Jane Austen's view of mankind that brothers and sisters, parents and children resemble each other so capriciously. We are apt to expect too much from family likeness and allow too little for family unlikeness; but it is surprising to find no trace of resemblance, for instance, between Emma Woodhouse and

[1] I. iii. (iii.). [2] I. vii. (vii.).

her father, Elizabeth Bennet and her sister Jane, John and Isabella Thorpe, and the three sisters, Lady Bertram, Mrs. Norris, and Mrs. Price. It is hardly credible that the cold, precise, and invariably insipid Lady Middleton, whose manners 'had all the elegance which her husband's wanted,' should have been the daughter of the loud, vulgar, and indiscreet, though benevolent and hospitable Mrs. Jennings, to whom we are now introduced, or that Mr. Gardiner should have been the brother of Mrs. Bennet. A writer of fiction, however, is not bound to study mere probability too closely; since, as Aristotle says, 'the improbable has a tendency to occur.' The greatest writers are the most audacious in disregarding ordinary probability; improbability creates the desired situation; and, after all, we are often surprised by family unlikeness where we had expected likeness. That like produces unlike is as much a truism as that like produces like.

Mrs. Jennings's business in life is stated in a few words:—

> Mrs. Jennings was a widow, with an ample jointure. She had only two daughters, both of whom she had lived to see respectably married, and she had now, therefore, nothing to do but to marry all the rest of the world.[1]

One necessary qualification for this profession, however, is the power of divining who are the pairs in love with each other or likely to be in love; and Mrs. Jennings's *flair* (she was 'a great wonderer') is as often at fault as Emma Woodhouse's. But her discovery, as early as the eighth chapter, that Colonel Brandon, a friend of Sir John Middleton, is in love with Marianne Dashwood, is to be set down to her

[1] I. viii. (viii.).

credit, and is one of the strokes of self-concealing art in which Jane Austen delighted; for in the end Colonel Brandon, though more than twice her age, was to marry Marianne. There is much to like in Mrs. Jennings, 'a good-humoured, merry, fat, elderly woman, who talked a great deal, seemed very happy, and rather vulgar.' She is always prominent, whether at Barton or in London, with her 'noisy cheerfulness'; large, officious, voluble, and observant, she is the most conspicuous figure in any company. She is full of plans to help everybody, and does not spare herself; she is usually wrong in her conclusions and judgments in matters of fact and matters of taste, but by no means always wrong in matters of feeling, which is more important than taste.

Elinor's undeclared lover, Edward Ferrars, as appears during the course of the narrative, was not free. He had been for four years secretly engaged to a Miss Lucy Steele, the evil genius of the story, false, unscrupulous, and vulgar with the vulgarity of a bad heart. Edward was heartily tired of her, but felt himself bound in honour to respect his engagement. This, however, did not prevent him from falling in love with Elinor. Elinor kept her own counsel; but Mrs. Dashwood, always sanguine and sentimental, chose to believe that she must be engaged to Edward Ferrars because she was in love with him. Edward Ferrars, it is true, had neither genius, good looks, nor fine manners, nor ambition enough to make the most of the talent he had. But he is the lover of Elinor, and we are expected to accept him.

Edward Ferrars was under the dominion of his

mother, a proud, domineering woman, of the kind sketched in the portrait of Mrs. Churchill in *Emma*, and more fully developed, though on different lines, in Lady Catherine de Bourgh. She, he knew, would have no scruple in disinheriting a son who displeased her. The engagement must, therefore, be secret. Edward had wished to be a clergyman :[1]

> . . . but that was not smart enough for my family (he says). They recommended the army. That was a great deal too smart for me. The law was allowed to be genteel enough ; . . . but I had no inclination for the law, . . . and at length, as there was no necessity of my having any profession at all, as I might be as dashing and expensive without a red coat on my back as with one, idleness was pronounced on the whole to be the most advantageous and honourable. . . .
>
> I was therefore entered at Oxford, and have been properly idle ever since.[2]

Notwithstanding his entanglement with Lucy Steele, Edward Ferrars pays the Dashwoods a sudden visit at Barton Cottage. He had been a fortnight staying with some friends near Plymouth,[3] but gave no further explanation of his coming on to Devonshire. He was out of spirits, cold and reserved in his manner, especially to Elinor, who was surprised and hurt; and though he soon fell into the ways of the house, and spent a week at Barton Cottage, he would stay no longer, though pressed, nor did his constrained manner give place to natural gaiety. He left Elinor perplexed in mind, though unwilling to doubt his affection.

Some time before Edward Ferrars's visit to Barton took place, a new actor appeared upon the little stage. Marianne sprained her ankle, and was carried into the

[1] I. xix. (xix.). [2] *Ibid.* [3] I. xvi. (xvi.).

house by a stranger, who seemed worthy to be the hero of her romance. His name was Willoughby; he was handsome, agreeable, and rich; he admired Cowper and Scott, and was indifferent to Pope. He called at the house every day; they read, they talked, they rode, they sang together. In a week's time Mrs. Dashwood was able secretly to congratulate herself on having gained 'two such sons-in-law as Edward and Willoughby,' for Marianne began now to perceive

> . . . that the desperation which had seized her at sixteen and a half of ever seeing a man who could satisfy her ideas of perfection had been rash and unjustifiable.[1]
>
> When he [Willoughby] was present she had no eyes for any one else. Everything he did was right. Everything he said was clever. If their evenings at the Park were concluded with cards, he cheated himself and all the rest of the party to get her a good hand. If dancing formed the amusement of the night they were partners for half the time; and when obliged to separate for a couple of dances were careful to stand together, and scarcely spoke a word to any body else. Such conduct made them, of course, most exceedingly laughed at; but ridicule could not shame, and seemed hardly to provoke them.[2]

Marianne even allowed him to cut off a lock of her hair; she drove alone with him to Allenham, a house he was one day to inherit, and spent an hour walking about there, exposing herself to the unguarded remarks of her younger sister, Margaret, and the impertinent curiosity of Mrs. Jennings:—

> 'I hope you like your house, Miss Marianne. It is a very large one, I know, and when I come to see you, I hope you will have furnished it, for it wanted it very much when I was there six years ago,' says Mrs. Jennings.[3]

[1] I. x. (x.). [2] I. xi. (xi.). [3] I. xiii. (xiii.).

Marianne's unreserve, which exposed her to all the troubles that came upon her afterwards, is an essential part of her character. Reserve seemed to her disgraceful subjection of reason to commonplace and mistaken notions; with strong affections self-command was impossible, with calm ones it could have no merit.[1] Poor Elinor, whose love might not be shown, since Edward had not openly declared his own, could only disapprove Marianne's want of reticence, and be thought cold and cautious by the two people who knew her best. And all the while Willoughby is a worthless character, a spendthrift and a libertine, from whom Marianne must by one way or another be separated. Marianne's infatuation for him is inexcusable; still more inexcusable is her disregard of everything and everybody that comes into competition with him. In actual life, though we may disapprove, we do not withhold sympathy from such a lover. Marianne is a Juliet who has mistaken her Romeo; but she is not therefore worthy of the prosaic ending of her story. The heroine of the grand-romantic style is a figure that can never disappear from literature; but Marianne's character is not strong enough to raise her to the height of a tragic ending. It would be out of proportion. Therefore she fails, but not deplorably and ridiculously; her temperament after all is not irrational, and when convinced of Willoughby's worthlessness, she accepts the situation as it is. The author, in her wish to point the moral of Marianne's impulsive folly, forgot to make her tempter sufficiently attractive, forgot also to make the reader completely realise that part of Colonel Brandon's

[1] See I. xix. (xix.).

righteous indignation proceeded from jealousy, that he was a lover as well as a guardian angel.

Lucy Steele and her elder sister Anne arrive at Barton Park by the invitation of Sir John Middleton, who has discovered a cousinship. Elinor and Marianne have soon seen enough of them. But the Miss Steeles

> . . . came from Exeter well provided with admiration for the use of Sir John Middleton, his family and all his relations, and no niggardly portion was now dealt out to his fair cousins, whom they declared to be the most beautiful, elegant, accomplished and agreeable girls they had ever beheld, and with whom they were particularly anxious to be better acquainted.[1]

Sir John Middleton soon communicated to his new friends the supposed state of the Miss Dashwoods' affections. Jokes were openly made about Marianne's 'very smart beau,' and 'the first letter in the name of Ferrars'—baronets of those days seem to have been strangely ill-bred;—and not long after, Lucy Steele engages Elinor in a conversation, and tells her, under cover of asking advice, and with a pledge of secrecy, her whole story.

Elinor, unwilling to think ill of her lover, tried to find excuses for him.

> Had Edward been intentionally deceiving her? Had he feigned a regard for her which he did not feel? Was his engagement to Lucy an engagement of the heart? No; whatever it might once have been, she could not believe it such at present. His affection was all her own. She could not be deceived in that. . . . But if he had injured her, how much more had he injured himself! . . . She might in time regain tranquillity; but *he*, what had he to look forward to? Could he ever be tolerably happy with Lucy Steele, . . . illiterate, artful, and selfish?[2]

[1] I. xxi. (xxi.). [2] II. i. (xxiii.).

The movement of the story, which was dragging, is helped by a change of scene: Elinor and Marianne accept an invitation to stay in London with Mrs. Jennings; and Marianne's hope of seeing Willoughby again seemed likely to be gratified. She wrote to him, but received no answer, nor any recognition but a card left at Mrs. Jennings's house in Berkeley Street a week later.

Marianne's love-sick condition is described in every phase—'her agony of despair and hope, her abandonment to passion in spite of all that Elinor can do to comfort her.' Willoughby, and Willoughby alone, engaged all her thoughts. No occupation could distract her mind, and in the selfishness of grief she avoided all company, entirely neglecting the common offices of civility to Mrs. Jennings, in whose house she was living. As for Colonel Brandon, who could not keep away from Marianne, and visited the house almost daily, she seemed not to know he was there. The intolerable suspense made him confide in Elinor. 'Is everything finally settled?' he asks. 'Is it impossible to—— But I have no right, and I have no chance of succeeding.' It was difficult for Elinor to answer; for Marianne had not confided her secret to her sister, and Elinor knew no more than all the world, that cared to know, knew.

He listened to her with silent attention, and on her ceasing to speak, rose from his seat, and after saying in a voice of emotion, 'To your sister I wish all imaginable happiness: to Willoughby, that he may endeavour to deserve her,'—took leave, and went away.[1]

Willoughby and Marianne meet at a party, in 'a

[1] II. v. (xxvii.).

room splendidly lit up, quite full of company, and insufferably hot.' Willoughby was engaged 'in earnest conversation with a very fashionable-looking young woman. Elinor soon caught his eye, and he immediately bowed, but without attempting to speak to her, or to approach Marianne, though he could not but see her.' At length he turned and spoke, but with constraint, and only to make a few commonplace inquiries.

> Her face was crimsoned over, and she exclaimed in a voice of the greatest emotion, 'Good God! Willoughby, what is the meaning of this? Have you not received my letters? Will you not shake hands with me?'

This painful scene ends as it began. He appeared to catch the eye of the lady with whom he had been talking, and turned hastily away with a slight bow. He was already, as we soon hear, engaged to this lady, a Miss Grey, an heiress.

The next evening Marianne received a letter from Willoughby containing her letters and the lock of her hair—'a letter of which every line was an insult, and which proclaimed its writer to be deep in hardened villainy.'[1]

What was Elinor's astonishment on hearing from Marianne that there was no formal engagement between her and Willoughby, that he had never told her that he loved her. 'It was every day implied, but never professedly declared.' Yet she is convinced that Willoughby cannot be false, and her woman's wit persuades her that some woman is at the back of all this heartlessness.

[1] II. vi. (xxviii.).

Good Mrs. Jennings, kindly and coarse, thought that delicate food, talk, and the news of the day would bring her to herself.

'Poor soul, how it grieves me to see her! and I declare she has gone away without finishing her wine! And the dried cherries too! Lord! nothing seems to do her any good! . . . Well, it is the oddest thing to me that a man should use such a pretty girl so ill! But when there is plenty of money on one side, and next to none on the other, Lord bless you! they care no more about such things!'——

'The lady then—Miss Grey, I think you called her—is very rich?'

'Fifty thousand pounds, my dear. Did you ever see her? a smart, stylish girl, they say, but not handsome. . . . Fifty thousand pounds! and by all accounts it won't come before it is wanted; for they say he is all to pieces. No wonder! dashing about with his curricle and hunters!'[1]

To Colonel Brandon falls the unwelcome task of disclosing to Elinor Willoughby's true character.

Willoughby's fortune was never large, and he had always been in debt, trusting to the benevolent intentions of a cousin, Mrs. Smith, whose heir he expected to be. Like Henry Crawford in *Mansfield Park*, he amused himself with making love to Marianne, with no other view than that of passing his time in Devonshire pleasantly. Like Henry Crawford, he found himself in love against his will. He put off a direct declaration till his circumstances should be less embarrassed. Meanwhile his patroness, Mrs. Smith, discovered that he had seduced and deserted a young girl—Eliza Williams her name—who, as it happened, was nearly connected with Colonel Brandon; and finding that he refused to marry the unfortunate Eliza,

[1] II. viii. (xxx.).

'formally dismissed him from her favour and her house.' Colonel Brandon felt his honour compromised, and challenged Willoughby. They met, but parted unwounded.[1] Willoughby, excusing himself on the score of poverty, gave up all hope of marrying Marianne, though he knew her to be devoted to himself, avoided her when the Dashwoods came to London, and finally turned his back on her.

Soon after this Willoughby and Miss Grey are married, and that chapter is closed.

Marianne's first thought and word was for her sister.

'How long has this been known to you, Elinor? Has he written to you?'

'I have known it these four months. When Lucy first came to Barton Park last November, she told me in confidence of her engagement.'

At these words, Marianne's eyes expressed the astonishment which her lips could not utter. After a pause of wonder, she exclaimed—

'Four months!—Have you known of this four months?'

Elinor confirmed it.

'What!—while attending me in all my misery, has this been on your heart?—and I have reproached you for being happy!'[2]

But she does not at first feel how much Elinor had suffered, how she had sacrificed herself in order to keep her promise to Lucy Steele; to suffer and be silent is inconceivable to her: when she does, all her warmth of affection comes out.

Marianne was quite subdued.

'O, Elinor!' she cried, 'you have made me hate myself for ever. How barbarous have I been to you!'[3]

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[1] II. ix. (xxxi.). [2] III. i. (xxxvii.). [3] *Ibid.*

Passages such as this reveal the beauty of Marianne's disposition, obscured as it is by a cloud of absurdity. A sudden change of circumstance, or a revelation of what had passed unnoticed, often brings out the genuine nature of Jane Austen's characters.

It must seem to a modern reader strange that when Elinor is supposed to be engaged to Edward, and Marianne not to be engaged to Willoughby, neither sister takes the other into full confidence, and the point of honour prevents any questions being asked by sister or mother. Nowadays, the secret would have been revealed to the nearest ones; their line of action would be to deny to others that Elinor had loved, had suffered, and had been slighted.

The story of Edward Ferrars's engagement, so faithfully guarded by Elinor, was 'popped out' by the elder Miss Steele to Mrs. John Dashwood, who, as reported to Elinor by Mrs. Jennings, flew into hysterics,

> . . . and a terrible scene took place, for Lucy was come to them by that time, little dreaming what was going on. Poor soul! I pity *her*, and I must say, I think she was used very hardly; for your sister [Mrs. John Dashwood] scolded like any fury, and soon drove her into a fainting fit. Nancy, she fell upon her knees, and cried bitterly; and your brother, he walked about the room, and said he did not know what to do. Mrs. Dashwood declared they should not stay a minute longer in the house.[1]

Mrs. Jennings runs on in her benevolent inconsequent way, talking sense in the form of nonsense, and seeing no reason why Ferrars and Lucy should not live on five hundred a year, if Mrs. Ferrars would allow Edward so much; for Mrs. Jennings in her generous estimate of

[1] III. i. (xxxvii.).

what is reasonable did not consider how many people are neither generous nor reasonable.

Mrs. Ferrars lost no time in turning her son Edward out of doors and cutting him off with two thousand pounds, transferring the rest of his heritage to his younger brother, Robert. Mrs. Jennings's comment upon this is :—

> Well! that is her revenge. Everybody has a way of their own. But I don't think mine would be to make one son independent because another had plagued me.[1]

Edward and Lucy Steele decide to make the best of it, though he, inevitably but not very handsomely, gave her the opportunity of breaking off the engagement. What Mrs. Jennings thought of this whole affair was this—for Edward proposes to take orders and hope for a living :—

> Wait for his having a living!—aye, we all know how *that* will end;—they will wait a twelvemonth, and finding no good comes of it, will set down upon a curacy of fifty pounds a year, with the interest of his two thousand pounds, and what little matter Mr. Steele and Mr. Pratt can give her.—Then they will have a child every year! And Lord help 'em! how poor they will be!—I must see what I can give them towards furnishing their house. Two maids and two men indeed!—as I talked of t'other day.—No, no, they must get a stout girl of all works.—Betty's sister would never do for them *now*.[2]

Mrs. Jennings, then, did not hold with Jane's own opinion, expressed in one of her letters: 'As for money, that will come you may be sure, because they cannot do without it'[3]: a piece of insight which common experience confirms.

[1] III. i. (xxxvii.). [2] III. ii. (xxxviii.). [3] Brabourne, ii. 33.

This difficulty is arranged by the unexpected offer from Colonel Brandon of the living of Delaford, close to his own house, and Edward Ferrars is made, by his own protestation to Elinor, 'a very—an exceedingly happy man.'[1]

When the news was carried to Lucy,

> . . . she was not only ready to worship [Colonel Brandon] as a saint, but was moreover truly anxious that he should be treated as one in all worldly concerns: anxious that his tithes should be raised to the utmost; and secretly resolved to avail herself at Delaford, as far as she possibly could, of his servants, his carriage, his cows, and his poultry.[2]

The next important event is Lucy Steele's marriage, announced, as news from Exeter, to the Dashwoods by their man-servant as he waited at table. Though the event was not unexpected, Elinor turned pale, Marianne fell into hysterics.

Day after day passed with no further news—Elinor thought their friends must have forgotten them. Suddenly, when Brandon was expected, Edward appeared, agitated, pale, and uncertain of his welcome. An awful dearth of topics silenced all four, till after some attempts to break it, Elinor,

> . . . resolving to exert herself, though fearing the sound of her own voice, . . . said, 'Is Mrs. Ferrars at Longstaple?'
>
> 'At Longstaple?' he replied, with an air of surprise. 'No, my mother is in town.'
>
> 'I meant,' said Elinor, taking up some work from the table, 'to inquire after Mrs. *Edward* Ferrars.'
>
> She dared not look up; but her mother and Marianne both turned their eyes on him. He coloured, seemed perplexed, looked doubtingly, and after some hesitation said:—

[1] III. iv. (xl.). [2] III. v. (xli.).

'Perhaps you mean—my brother—you mean Mrs.—Mrs. *Robert* Ferrars.'

'Mrs. Robert Ferrars?' was repeated by Marianne and her mother in an accent of the utmost amazement; and though Elinor could not speak, even *her* eyes were fixed on him with the same impatient wonder. He rose from his seat and walked to the window, apparently from not knowing what to do, took up a pair of scissors that lay there, and while spoiling both them and their sheath by cutting the latter to pieces as he spoke, said in an hurried voice :—

'Perhaps you do not know—you may not have heard—that my brother is lately married to—to the youngest—to Miss Lucy Steele.'

His words were echoed with unspeakable astonishment by all but Elinor, who sat with her head leaning over her work, in a state of such agitation as made her hardly know where she was.

'Yes,' said he, 'they were married last week, and are now at Dawlish.'

Elinor could sit it no longer. She almost ran out of the room, and as soon as the door was closed, burst into tears of joy, which at first she thought would never cease.[1]

They were soon dried; for Edward had come to be forgiven, and Elinor's joy at being united to him left no room for anything else—indeed there was plenty to be forgiven, since she was in that humour. 'She was oppressed, she was overcome by her own felicity.'

We are not surprised to hear that when the dinner-bell rang and

. . . they all sat down to table at four o'clock, about three hours after his arrival, he had secured his lady, engaged her mother's consent, and was not only in the rapturous profession of the lover, but in the reality of reason and truth, one of the happiest of men.[2]

[1] III. xii. (xlviii.). [2] III. xiii. (xlix.).

And Elinor? Her heart was so singly set upon Edward Ferrars that we must hope no doubt of his adequacy ever came across her; for he was after all an inferior hero, inferior to Darcy, Tilney, Wentworth, and Knightley; perhaps a fair match to the uninteresting Bingley. Even with convention to help us, we cannot avoid the feeling that Elinor is too soft-hearted in her acceptance of Edward within a few moments of the announcement, made by himself, of his brother's marriage to Lucy Steele, and only a few days after he had been jilted by her. Elizabeth Bennet would not have behaved so, nor, we may guess, would Jane Austen herself. Edward was forgiven on the ground of an engagement. The code of honour rules all, excuses all; and the case of Captain Wentworth in *Persuasion* shows again that the author herself considered the question as not arguable beyond the limits of convention. But indeed some of our author's heroines behave with surprising meekness: Fanny Price, Anne Elliot, Jane Bennet, like Elinor Dashwood, accept their fate without question. Woman was as yet unemancipated; her function in life was to get married.

Marianne should have died for love; but people do not—in Jane Austen's experience—die of love; and as she had the *besoin d'aimer*, it was not unnatural that fuel for the fire should be found; and there it was, close at hand. The dearest wish of her sister and Edward was that she should live close to them at Delaford. It was her mother's darling object.

And we read at the end of all:—

> Marianne Dashwood was born to an extraordinary fate. She was born to discover the falsehood of her own opinions

and to counteract, by her conduct, her most favourite maxims. She was born to overcome an affection formed so late in life as at seventeen, and with no sentiment superior to strong esteem and lively friendship, voluntarily to give her hand to another !—and *that* other, a man who had suffered no less than herself under the event of a former attachment, whom, two years before, she had considered too old to be married,—and who still sought the constitutional safeguard of a flannel waistcoat !

But so it was. Instead of falling a sacrifice to an irresistible passion, as once she had fondly flattered herself with expecting, instead of remaining even for ever with her mother, and finding her only pleasures in retirement and study, as afterwards in her more calm and sober judgment she had determined on,—she found herself, at nineteen, submitting to new attachments, entering on new duties, placed in a new home, a wife, the mistress of a family, and the patroness of a village.[1]

Jane Austen probably learnt by experience that the supreme quality of her work lay not so much in construction and the providing of incident as in characterisation and the dramatic and semi-dramatic art of conversation. Her plots, such as they are, are carefully thought out, and one of the pleasures of attentive reading is to mark the finger-posts on the road which indicate future developments by their truth to character at the moment, even if they do not catch our attention at first; such as Knightley's dislike of Frank Churchill. But we care about the personages more than their fortunes, and if *Sense and Sensibility* does not come among the highest in our affections, it is because none of the characters reaches the highest point of interest and attractiveness, except the mother and her daughters—a charming group.

[1] III. xiv. (l.).

The development of the plot is not uniformly successful. Startling events, such as the duel between Brandon and Willoughby, and Lucy Steele's elopement with Robert Ferrars, are not made dramatic; the reader is not invited to guess what is going to happen, nor when they take place do they produce an effect in proportion to their startlingness.[1]

Willoughby's story is intricate and mixed up with an old love affair of Brandon's; it is withheld till near the end of the book, and then, as we have seen, told by a third person, Brandon himself; and as we have not been made acquainted with the three or four actors in this episode, we read with little emotion of the fate of Eliza, and Willoughby's seduction of her daughter. The device of holding over an interest, in order to give it its full value at the right moment, is overdone; Colonel Brandon's agitation in the thirteenth chapter and Willoughby's in the fifteenth puzzle the reader no less than Mrs. Dashwood herself; and though Mrs. Dashwood could not be told that these two gentlemen intended to shoot at each other with loaded pistols, no etiquette required that the reader should be kept from a knowledge of this fact till near the end of the third volume. A riddle that cannot be guessed is tedious, and surely no reader ever guessed this riddle without help.

Willoughby is not quite real enough to make us sympathise with his joys, sorrows, and temptations; his

[1] This is especially true of the scene quoted above. The incident is admirably conceived, but the reader is inert when he should have been in conscious suspense; and the effect is less striking than in the cases which may be compared to it, in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*.

career is only sketched, and sketched too late, when we care neither for his misfortunes, his crimes, nor his tardy and ineffectual repentance. Colonel Brandon, who is destined to take Willoughby's place in Marianne's susceptible heart, has nothing to recommend him but sterling qualities. The match is like those which take place every day, amuse everybody for a short time, and turn out well in the end.

Lucy Steele's transference of her patronage from Edward to Robert Ferrars and her elopement with him are too like what we are told had happened to Colonel Brandon some years before. An incident like this, violent rather than dramatic, requires more elaboration than it receives to make it probable and acceptable.

In spite of shortcomings, *Sense and Sensibility* holds its own. The study of sensibility in Marianne is unlike anything in literature. All the author's customary skill is displayed in the social scenes at Barton and in London. The comedy is well played, whether or not the *dénouement* is adequate. We are always entertained, and consistency of character is never neglected. The minor characters —the vulgar Steeles, the silly Palmers, the insignificant Middletons, the disagreeable Ferrars family (of which Edward is the only tolerable member)—are always true to sample.

CHAPTER IV

'PRIDE AND PREJUDICE'

Pride and Prejudice, published in January 1813 was the first written of Jane Austen's works, though not the first to appear. It was begun in October 1796 and was finished in August 1797. The original title of *Pride and Prejudice* was *First Impressions*; perhaps a better title than the other, since it gives the key to the story, whereas the title *Pride and Prejudice* is in itself a problem which is only solved by reading the book. The manuscript was offered to Cadell, the London publisher, in November 1797; but the offer was refused by return of post.

The scene of *Pride and Prejudice* is laid at the village of Longbourn, a mile from the market-town of Meryton in Hertfordshire. Mr. Bennet is a country gentleman with a good income; but as he has no son, and the property is entailed on a distant cousin, his five daughters, according to Mrs. Bennet's domestic logic, have nothing to look forward to but marriage. The characters are country neighbours, a degree below the 'county' limit, of the type which has been gradually abolished by political changes, railways, industrialism, and the concentration of wealth; families living on small inherited properties, and rich enough to keep horses and carriages

and exchange hospitality with their neighbours;—'I know,' says Mrs. Bennet, 'that we dine with twenty-four families';—proud of their family traditions and their dissociation from trade, and willing to be connected with the county, looking for their living to the genteel professions, the church, the navy and army, and the law; and sometimes making a match with more money than station to commend it. The chief point of difference between this society and that in which we live is in the stationary character of its conditions and outlook. Family generations are born, and die, and are succeeded by their descendants, living in the same places and doing the same things. There is also little change of ideas; democracy has not yet raised her horrid head. Jane Austen's family was connected with the clergy and with the settled gentry, both of the higher and lower order; and her stories, like her letters, are concerned with no other classes.

Jane Austen's opening sentences are always exhilarating. *Pride and Prejudice* begins with the following words:—

> It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.

This generalisation stimulates interest and sets the reader to examine his own experience, and identify in his imagination the persons to whom the words 'universally acknowledged' apply. A country neighbourhood and its gossips occur to the fancy; 'three or four families in a country village are the very thing to work on'; the valuable young man, the expectant

mothers, the not impossible, not unwilling daughters; and the scene opens with Mrs. Bennet in the full parade of her vulgarity, greediness, and silliness. The rest of the family fall in and play their parts, and by the end of a short first chapter we hardly need to be told that 'Mr. Bennet was an odd mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice'; and that Mrs. Bennet 'was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper. . . . The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news.'[1] Mrs. Bennet is always herself, consistent in her inconsistency, and losing no opportunity of making her daughters blush for her, and of providing merriment to her clever, indolent, and rather heartless husband.

Women of this type, loud, busy, and commonplace, had a certain attraction for the author; perhaps because they were interested in other people, and did not keep their selfishness entirely for themselves. She has some kindly feeling for Mrs. Bennet, and a good deal for Mrs. Jennings in *Sense and Sensibility*; I am not sure that she abhors even Mrs. Norris, who can be kind to a niece. It is better to bustle about the world like Mrs. Jennings, who is by far the best of the three, than to sit up and think about new clothes, like Mrs. Allen in *Northanger Abbey*, or lie on a sofa and think about nothing, like Lady Bertram in *Mansfield Park*.

In a few sentences we are introduced to Mr. Bennet, in whom irony is the most salient quality, but who by wit, quick common sense, and appreciation of character makes some amends for the selfish indifference which is the ground of his character. A chance word from

[1] *Pride and Prejudice*, I. i. (i.).

him singles out Elizabeth from his other children, and we are at once prepared to be interested in and for her, and to be curious about the 'single man in possession of a good fortune,' Mr. Bingley, the new neighbour who has taken Netherfield.

The family consists of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet and five daughters; Jane, pronounced by Darcy at the Meryton ball to be 'the only handsome girl in the room'; Elizabeth, the heroine; Lydia, silly and unprincipled; and two others, Mary and Kitty, who do not add much to the interest of the story.

Jane Austen liked Elizabeth the best of all her heroines. 'I must confess (she writes to Cassandra) that I think her as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print.'[1] We may guess that Emma, whom, she says, 'every one will not like,' would come next on the list, and perhaps Catherine Morland, perhaps Anne Elliot after her; though of Anne she writes, 'She is almost too good for me.' Her women, setting aside those introduced for the sake of contrast and comedy, represent mainly two types, active and passive, stimulating and reposeful. She liked a character with contrasts and faults; but her judgment, which was always directed by principle, respected the self-sacrificing or self-effacing Annes and Fannys.

Elizabeth's gaiety, high spirit and courage, wit and readiness, as well as her good sense and right feeling, are set off and made individual and 'delightful' by her humour—Jane's own humour, which glances in every page of her writing, but is nowhere so fully exhibited in character as here; for the reflections of a like quality

[1] Jan. 29, 1813. *Memoir*, p. 98.

in Emma, Catherine Morland, and Tilney are pale in comparison with Elizabeth. She is as much alive as Clarissa or Shirley or Bathsheba Everdene or Clara Middleton, and in the unity of a nature full of contradictions belongs to the highest class of creations in comedy.

Bingley is a courteous, rather colourless, popular young man, who prefers taking the advice of his friend Darcy on all subjects to making his own resolutions. Darcy, a rich Derbyshire squire, is proud, sardonic, and reserved. Here is the description of the group of five who entered the Assembly Room at Meryton :—

> Mr. Bingley was good-looking and gentlemanlike ; he had a pleasant countenance and easy, unaffected manners. . . . His friend Mr. Darcy soon drew the attention of the room by his fine tall person, handsome features, noble mien, and the report, which was in general circulation within five minutes after his entrance, of his having ten thousand a year. The gentlemen pronounced him to be a fine figure of a man, the ladies declared he was much handsomer than Mr. Bingley, and he was looked at with great admiration for about half the evening, till his manners gave a disgust, which turned the tide of his popularity ; for he was discovered to be proud.[1]

Was the cackle of cocks and hens ever more happily rendered ? Elizabeth Bennet was offended by Darcy's being too proud to dance at this country ball—'In such an assembly as this,' he says, 'it would be insupportable' ;—and in particular by having overheard herself pronounced by him to be 'tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt *him*.'[2]

No one was surprised at Darcy's preference of Jane to all the pretty girls in the room. Nobody was jealous of Jane, for Jane could think ill of nobody. Not so

[1] I. iii. (iii.). [2] *Ibid.*

Elizabeth, who had a quick perception of what was ridiculous, mean, or pretentious, a courageous temper, and a ready tongue. As they came to meet each other in the following days her resentment of Darcy's arrogance gave him the opportunity of knowing her better, which is what he secretly desired; for her determination to make him feel her dislike and disapproval made her talk to him, and kept alive a mutual interest, which was animated on her part by a fresh reason for disliking him.

George Wickham, a fashionable, handsome, and agreeable young man, comes down to stay with the militia regiment quartered at Meryton, and conquers all hearts. From him Elizabeth learns a dreadful tale of Darcy's wickedness. Wickham had, it seemed, been particularly commended to Darcy by his dying father, and the succession to a living promised him. Darcy had not only treated him coldly but had refused to present him to the living. Wickham's hope of a sufficient income was thus taken away, and he was reduced to seek a commission in the militia.

Jane Bennet, who had formed a friendship with Bingley's sister Caroline, fell ill at Netherfield, and had to be nursed there by the Bingleys.[1] Elizabeth went to her, and was thus thrown into Darcy's company, which both attracted and repelled her; and a kind of hostile intimacy springs up, tantalising but stimulating to Darcy, who is ready to fall in love with her if she would give him the slightest encouragement:—

[1] This is a common substitute for incident in Jane Austen's works: Marianne in *Sense and Sensibility* falls ill at Mrs. Jennings's house, Louisa Musgrove in *Persuasion* is invalided with the Harvilles.

. . . there was a mixture of sweetness and archness in her manner which made it difficult for her to affront anybody; and Darcy had never been so bewitched by any woman as he was by her. He really believed that were it not for the inferiority of her connections he should be in some danger.[1]

Meanwhile Bingley was falling in love with Jane Bennet, and she with him, and Elizabeth at least inclined to like Wickham. Miss Bingley reserves Darcy for herself, and tries to detach her brother from Jane; according to her plan she was to marry Darcy, and her brother, Darcy's sister Georgina. Her plan, however, was not destined to succeed.

A diversion from the main progress of the story is introduced with Mr. Collins, one of the most famous characters in comedy, a grotesque of the highest order, worthy of Molière or Dickens. Mr. Collins is a distant cousin of Mr. Bennet, and the next heir to the Longbourn estate, entailed upon him after Mr. Bennet's death. This did not make him shy of his cousins; on the contrary he intended to make amends by marrying one of them; and being informed by Mrs. Bennet, always sanguine, inaccurate, and communicative, that Jane is already nearly engaged to Bingley, he promptly transfers his attentions from her to Elizabeth.

May I hope, madam, for your interest with your fair daughter Elizabeth when I solicit for the honour of a private audience with her in the course of this morning?[2]

All Mr. Collins is in this speech—stupidity, pompousness, conceit, and clumsiness. He proceeds to set forth in order his motives in asking her to be his wife; firstly,

[1] I. x. (x.). [2] I. xix. (xix.).

his position as a clergyman, and secondly, the advice ('unasked too!') of the very noble lady whom he had the honour of calling patroness, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, who had recommended him to choose a gentlewoman, for *her* sake;

> . . . and for your *own* (she said), let her be an active, useful sort of person, not brought up high, but able to make a small income go a good way. This is my advice. Find such a woman as soon as you can, bring her to Hunsford, and I will visit her.[1]

Elizabeth of course refused him at once. But Mr. Collins waved her refusal aside as only a move in the game played by all 'elegant females.'

Mrs. Bennet assures Mr. Collins that 'Lizzie shall be brought to reason,' and calls to Mr. Bennet in his study to scold Lizzie into compliance.

> 'Come here, child,' cried her father as she appeared. 'I have sent for you on an affair of importance. I understand that Mr. Collins has made you an offer of marriage. Is it true?' Elizabeth replied that it was 'Very well—and this offer of marriage you have refused?'
>
> 'I have, Sir.'
>
> 'Very well. We now come to the point. Your mother insists upon your accepting it. Is it not so, Mrs. Bennet?'
>
> 'Yes, or I will never see her again.'
>
> 'An unhappy alternative is before you, Elizabeth. From this day you must be a stranger to one of your parents. Your mother will never see you again if you do *not* marry Mr. Collins, and I will never see you again if you *do*.'[2]

This also is comedy of the highest order, with the touch of exaggeration or burlesque which is essential to comedy. No parent was ever quite so foolish as Mrs.

[1] I. xix. (xix.). [2] I. xx. (xx.).

Bennet, nor so passionless as Mr. Bennet, unless he were also stupid, a vice which Mr. Bennet had no mind to. If Jane Austen sometimes allows her characters to exaggerate themselves it is with a dramatic purpose. Her dramatic instinct is one of the qualities which, as she herself knew, make her works so excellent for reading aloud. It is a useless speculation; but if she had turned her attention to play-writing, she might have been as celebrated there as in the line which she made her own.

Mr. Collins, thus disposed of, does not proceed any further down the list of the Bennet daughters, but without delay asks and obtains the hand of Charlotte Lucas, daughter of a prosperous tradesman who had been knighted as Mayor of Meryton. A woman is not usually disposed to like the wife of the man whom she has rejected, still less if he is plainly unworthy and she has been an intimate friend. The friendship must suffer a decline of temperature. 'Were I persuaded that Charlotte had any regard for him, I should only think worse of her understanding than I now do of her heart,'[1] says Elizabeth to Jane; but she is not irreconcilable, and after some hesitation accepts an invitation from the Collinses to stay with them at Hunsford Parsonage.

The fascinating Wickham, finding that Elizabeth had no prospect of riches, ceased to pay her any attention. 'His apparent partiality had subsided, his attentions were over, he was the admirer of some one else';[2] and Elizabeth was not broken-hearted. Can we suppose that Elizabeth, who was not perfect, had fancied herself in love with Wickham because she was

[1] I. xxiv. (xxiv.) [2] I. xxvi. (xxvi.).

determined to hate his enemy Darcy in spite of (or in consequence of) an attraction which made him always the most interesting as well as the most odious person in company whenever she met him? When they meet they must talk, and she must attack him and put him to his fencing. Her resentment against him for his sins against herself, her sister, her family, and Wickham did not prevent her from checking her mother when she began to find fault with him at the ball supper.[1] The chief of his offence was his disappointing the hopes of her sister Jane, who was in love with Bingley and had reason to think he cared for her; for Darcy had taken advantage of Bingley's pliability to detach him from Jane, and succeeded so far that the Bingleys left the neighbourhood of Longbourn to spend the winter in London.

Elizabeth cannot help talking about Darcy, though she detests him:—

> Lesbia mi dicit semper male, nec tacet umquam
> de me: Lesbia me dispeream nisi amat.

The visit to Hunsford not only introduces us again to the absurdities of Mr. Collins but brings us into the neighbourhood of Rosings and its mistress, Lady Catherine de Bourgh. A dinner at Rosings, at which nobody talked except Lady Catherine, is minutely and amusingly described. When the ladies returned to the drawing-room after dinner, Lady Catherine catechised her young guests; and she must have learnt from her first encounter with Elizabeth that she was not one of the nonentities who frequented the little court of Rosings.

'Upon my word,' said her Ladyship, 'you give your opinion very decidedly for so young a person. Pray, what is your age?'

[1] I. xviii.

'With three younger sisters grown up,' replied Elizabeth, smiling, 'your Ladyship can hardly expect me to own it.'

Lady Catherine seemed quite astonished at not receiving a direct answer; and Elizabeth suspected herself to be the first creature who had ever dared to trifle with so much dignified impertinence.

'You cannot be more than twenty, I am sure,—therefore you need not conceal your age.'

'I am not one-and-twenty.'[1]

But Lady Catherine, as we shall see, had a second bout with Elizabeth, who on that occasion fought with the same weapons and won an even more decisive victory.

Elizabeth must have soon learnt the full meaning of the word patronage. The Collinses, one or both, called at Rosings nearly every day :—

Now and then they were honoured by a call from her Ladyship, and nothing escaped her observation that was passing in the room during these visits. She examined into their employments, looked at their work, and advised them to do it differently; found fault with the arrangement of the furniture; or detected the housemaid in negligence; and if she accepted any refreshments seemed to do it only for the sake of finding out that Mrs. Collins's joints of meat were too large for her family.[2]

The subject of chief interest at the Parsonage was the expected arrival of Darcy and another nephew of Lady Catherine, Colonel Fitzwilliam, to pay a visit to their aunt. The two young men called at the Parsonage the day after their arrival, and often repeated their visit. Darcy's odd behaviour attracted remark. He came again and again to the Parsonage with his cousin Colonel Fitzwilliam, but would sit for ten minutes without opening his lips. Mrs. Collins knew not what to make of him; she watched him, but without much

[1] I. xxix. (xxix.). [2] I. xxx. (xxx.).

success. She had thought he might be in love, but Elizabeth laughed at the idea. As for Darcy himself, some consciousness of Elizabeth's resentment against him, though he could not know the cause of it, may have touched his pride, and made him wish to try his fortune; and any feeling on his part towards Elizabeth may have been quickened by finding a possible rival in Colonel Fitzwilliam, of whom we are told that 'Mrs. Collins's pretty friend had caught his fancy very much.'

Elizabeth meets Colonel Fitzwilliam in the park, and learns from him the extent of Darcy's evil influence over his friend Bingley. Till then she had put the blame of Bingley's desertion principally upon his sister Caroline; now Darcy was the chief offender.

Immediately after this comes the celebrated scene in which Darcy makes his offer and is refused.

Darcy had fallen in love. His pride made him confident of success; his passion prevailed over another kind of pride. The opposition which he had overcome came from himself only; he had no idea that stooping thus he could fail to conquer; he had not conceived that Elizabeth's feelings might be outraged by the contempt and scorn with which he had spoken of her relations, and the deep wound which he had inflicted in drawing Jane's lover away from her; and when she refused his offer, not without a peremptory haughtiness, he was at first too much astonished to speak. He 'seemed to catch her words with no less resentment than surprise.' And as she went on to accuse him of the unjust and ungenerous part he had acted towards her sister, by separating her from Bingley, he acknowledged and justified it:—

I have no wish of denying that I did everything in my power to separate my friend from your sister, or that I rejoice in my success.

Such an avowal as this, one would think, might well have ended the conversation. But Elizabeth would not let him off without further telling him that his cruelty to Wickham was the original ground of her dislike. She accused him of depriving 'the best years of his life of that independence which was no less his due than his desert.'

It was a contest between two high-mettled spirits; and he repeated his offence, and wounded her by retorting upon herself the imputation of pride:—

Perhaps (added he) these offences might have been overlooked, had not your pride been hurt by my honest confession of the scruples that had long prevented my forming any serious design. . . . Could you expect me to rejoice in the inferiority of your connections?

Elizabeth was in full career, and not to be stopped. She went on to assure him that nothing would have tempted her to accept him, from the very beginning, almost from the first moment of her acquaintance with him. . . .

'I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed upon to marry.'

'You have said quite enough, madam.'[1]

And indeed she had.

Allowing for stiffness of language and the ceremonious manners of the time, the whole scene is triumphantly vivid and dramatic, and no abridgment can do it justice.

[1] II. i. (xxxiv.).

In Elizabeth's mind surprise deepens repulsion. Yet no sooner is it all over, and she has cried for half an hour, than she admits to herself that 'it was gratifying to have inspired unconsciously so strong an affection.' 'Vanity!' says the critic. But no; the very fact of his overcoming obstacles was a proof of worthiness, if it had not been for 'his pride, his abominable pride—his shameless avowal!'[1]

The next scene in this strange history is the delivery of a letter into Elizabeth's hand by Darcy himself, in which he made matters worse by direct reflections on 'that total want of propriety so frequently, so almost uniformly, betrayed' by all the Bennet family except Jane, Elizabeth, and their father, and occasionally even by him. He regrets, but without much delicacy of feeling, if he has unknowingly wounded Jane's feelings, but still justifies himself. As far as Wickham is concerned, he has no reason to blame himself; and a description of Wickham's misdemeanours follows which fully exculpates Darcy.

Elizabeth cannot be acquitted of some want of sensibility if she felt the justice of Darcy's language about her family more than its impropriety; but she had never been under illusions in that quarter.

Darcy's letter, when read attentively, seems hardly consistent with his position at the moment, even when we consider the provocation under which he wrote. He had been convicted of inflicting great pain on Jane Bennet, from having acted under a false impression of her indifference to Bingley; but he makes light of this, sets his judgment against Elizabeth's,

[1] II. i. (xxxiv.).

and only yields hers the preference with a 'probably.' From her side his treatment of Jane might possibly be atoned for, if he was still all-powerful with Bingley; but to enter upon that subject at all with such an offender as Darcy was hardly to be reconciled with a delicate regard for a sister's feelings. To reveal her secret to a stranger and an enemy! Elizabeth's indignation ran away with her reserve.

Darcy's other crime, his insulting criticism of Elizabeth's nearest relations, was repeated and aggravated in the letter. Here he is the true nephew of Lady Catherine; and it is difficult to see how Elizabeth could have surmounted this obstacle, which could never be removed, since Darcy's estimate of her family was just, however harshly and crudely expressed. It was another instance of that pride and want of humanity which made her turn from him at their first meeting. She was right in her opinion of Darcy; Darcy was right in his opinion of her relations; how was any reconciliation to be found for these incompatible truths, consistent with a decent respect for her family, and her father in particular? I can find no solution of this problem unless it be in Jane Austen's belief in the overmastering power and the sufficiency of love. In her philosophy love prevails over prudence, family feelings, social conditions, worldly propriety. When love comes in at the door all other considerations fly out of the window. Wickham, and Willoughby in *Sense and Sensibility*, would have been forgiven if they had been true lovers; they are condemned because they are poor creatures, led by appetite, ambition, or avarice, not victims of high passion; such natures do

not approach the sanctity of love between two equal and exalted spirits. She has no condemnation for Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*; her disapproval in *Persuasion*, however moderately expressed, rests not upon Anne, but upon Lady Russell, who gives the foolish-wise counsel of prudence. To her mind the call of love, which comes to few, ought not to be resisted, cannot be resisted, when it comes; and this high-flown sentiment is the more interesting because all her sentiments are in accordance with common sense.

Darcy's letter convinced Elizabeth of Wickham's worthlessness; she could not resist the evidence; and an outburst of self-reproach follows:—

> How despicably have I acted! (she cried). I, who have prided myself on my discernment! I, who have valued myself on my abilities! who have often disdained the generous candour of my sister, and gratified my vanity in useless or blameable distrust. How humiliating is this discovery! Yet, how just a humiliation! Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind. But vanity, not love, has been my folly. . . . Till this moment I never knew myself.[1]

This is candour indeed; and as we read on we find prejudice melting so rapidly that Elizabeth's character is in danger of losing some of its integrity. Indignation against herself came into the place of indignation against Darcy, and 'his disappointed feelings became the object of compassion.' To effect this, a further motive must have been at work to reinforce candour and reason, or the female sex is slandered by common report. I cannot approve so rational an Elizabeth. No; this was love disguised in the garb of generosity.

[1] II. iii. (xxxvi.)

Soon after this Lydia, the giddiest of the sisters, had the supreme delight of being invited to stay with a friend, the wife of Colonel Forster, at the military camp at Brighton. She could look forward to a season of perfect happiness. 'She saw herself seated beneath a tent, tenderly flirting with at least six officers at once.'[1] The luckless Kitty was jealous, and openly expressed her discontent with home dulness. Even Elizabeth began to look about for some fresh change from the domestic discomfort of Longbourn.

Her tour with the Gardiners was now the object of her happiest thoughts. Her uncle Gardiner, Mrs. Bennet's brother, and his wife had asked her to go with them into Derbyshire, the county in which Mrs. Gardiner had once lived, and in which Pemberley, Darcy's estate, was situated. They go accordingly, and visit Pemberley amongst other places.

The beauty of Pemberley and its situation is described—'They were all of them warm in their admiration; and at that moment she felt that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!'[2]—but the recollection that in that situation she would not have been allowed to welcome there her homely uncle and aunt 'saved her from something like regret.' The fact that Elizabeth was well aware that ten thousand a year was ten thousand a year is evidence in favour of her honesty in having put aside the thought of it without a moment's hesitation.

To her extreme embarrassment, and even consternation, as they were walking before the house, the owner of it suddenly came in view. The housekeeper had told

[1] II. viii. (xli.). [2] II. x. (xliii.).

them that he was not expected till the following day. Elizabeth, 'astonished and confused, scarcely dared lift her eyes to his face, and knew not what answers she returned to his civil inquiries after her family . . . the few minutes in which they continued together were some of the most uncomfortable of her life.'[1] He was as much embarrassed as herself, and the interview ended abruptly; he suddenly recollected himself and took his leave. But he soon reappeared. He had recovered his self-control; he asked to be introduced to her friends; told her that the Bingleys would be with him on the next day, and asked that he might be allowed to introduce his sister to her acquaintance before she left Lambton. The visit took place; all went well, and the party was invited to dine at Pemberley.

The situation is bold, even improbable; but fiction would lose half its interest if all improbability were ruled out; and as this is one of the most celebrated scenes in fiction, it would be impertinent to question it.

This promising course of events is suddenly interrupted by a startling incident. News arrives of the elopement of Lydia Bennet, the fool of the family, with Wickham, ostensibly to be married in Scotland. But they had disappeared entirely from view, and there was reason to believe that they were still in London. All this Elizabeth heard in a letter from Jane, which she had hardly finished when Darcy came into the room. All reserve was at an end; she burst into tears and was silent. Then—'I have just had a letter from Jane, with such dreadful news!'—and the whole story comes out, a silly, shabby, vicious story. Darcy is deeply

[1] II. x. (xliii.)

shocked, but not surprised. He can say nothing; he only walks up and down the room with a gloomy air.

> Elizabeth soon observed, and instantly understood it. Her power was sinking; everything *must* sink under such a proof of family weakness. . . . The belief of his self-conquest brought nothing consolatory to her bosom, afforded no palliation of her distress. It was, on the contrary, exactly calculated to make her understand her own wishes; and never had she so honestly felt that she could have loved him, as now, when all love must be vain. But self, though it would intrude, could not engross her. Lydia—the humiliation, the misery she was bringing upon them all—soon swallowed up every private care.[1]

I would choose this passage as eminent among those which show the depth, as well as the keenness, of Jane Austen's perception of character. The complexity of human motives, the power of entertaining at the same moment a number of different emotions and thoughts, distinct and even mutually inconsistent, the sudden realisation of the truth,—all this was never set forth with more genius than in this short paragraph. Love and pride are still conflicting in Elizabeth's mind; but the cooler judgment pronounced by decorous convention and maidenly reserve, the allies of pride and prejudice, is upset by love, revealed in despair, and revealing itself by compelling her to seek sympathy from the injured and disdainful Darcy.

'Intricate characters are the most amusing,' says Elizabeth herself. Her own character appears intricate because her mind glances swiftly and sees clearly. It is most characteristic that she should have wished all unsaid soon after, to retain her secret for herself.

It is worth while to notice also how dramatic the

[1] II. xiii. (xlvi.).

moment is. At no other time was Elizabeth more assailable than now, when her pride was humbled, and she had no helper at home to turn to. Moments such as these do not often occur in Jane Austen's books; they do not often occur in life; but her instinct in introducing them and her skill in presenting them are infallible, because she has felt, as well as created, the situation. George Eliot told a friend that she had written the well-known dialogue in *Middlemarch* between Dorothea and Rosamond, at a sitting and without a pause, because she herself became in turn each of the two women, so that she could not write their thoughts otherwise than as she was living them in her own imagination. This power, which only a few writers possess, of identifying themselves with their creatures, is the miracle that can create Cleopatras and Rosalinds; and the possession of this rarest of gifts makes it not absurd to compare, in her degree, Jane Austen with Shakespeare. It is the same gift, though used to depict ordinary natures and trifling incidents.

As he quitted the room, Elizabeth felt how improbable it was that they should ever see each other again on such terms of cordiality as had marked their several meetings in Derbyshire; and as she threw a retrospective glance over the whole of their acquaintance, so full of contradictions and varieties, sighed at the perverseness of those feelings which would now have promoted its continuance, and would formerly have rejoiced in its termination.

If gratitude and esteem are good foundations of affection, Elizabeth's change of sentiment will be neither improbable nor faulty.[1]

But not so—she goes on to argue—if love at first

[1] II. xiii. (xlvi.).

sight is the only true love, 'so often described as arising on a first interview with its object, and even before two words have been exchanged.'[1]

Our author is not much given to moralising, and romantic raptures are unknown to her. She is pointing here at the Radcliffe and Wertherian school of sentimental romance as contrasted with that of Richardson. She set too high a value on real affection, such as could be felt by Knightley and Emma, Darcy and Elizabeth, Wentworth and Anne, to call it by the same name as the fire in the straw which lights up commonplace natures, hot and bright as it may be for a moment. She does not hold the uncomfortable creed that the best thing in the world is 'something out of it'; neither does she depict anything like the terrors of Rochester's wooing or the rigours of the Moore brothers and M. Paul Emanuel; still less does she rise to the neighbourhood of Biron's speech in *Love's Labour's Lost* and the Sonnets, whether Shakespeare's or from the Portuguese. 'Very excellent loves are born of pity,' one poet writes; 'Perfect esteem enlivened by desire' is another definition; here, as with Henry Tilney in *Northanger Abbey*, the origin of love is ascribed to gratitude, a pure but cold fountain. There is little passion in Jane Austen's lovers; moderate though happy are the raptures of Emma and Knightley, of Fanny and Edmund, of Anne and Wentworth; but the mutual confidence of 'happy lovers heart in heart' is truly and feelingly described. The life in which she moves is real, not ideal, lived among moderate hills and valleys; for summits and abysses we must go to greater writers.

[1] II. xiii. (xlvi.).

The episode of Lydia's elopement serves to bring out Jane Bennet's wearisome reluctance to think ill of anybody, Kitty's silliness and want of principle, Mrs. Bennet's incapacity of rising to an occasion, of seeing where the blame lay, of forgetting her own imaginary sufferings, of putting ideas in any relation to each other; and Mr. Bennet's 'philosophic composure,' only disturbed by the consciousness, which he was too clever to escape, that he himself was responsible for much of the disaster.

'Who should suffer but myself?' he says. 'It has been my own doing, and I ought to feel it.'

'You must not be too severe upon yourself,' replied Elizabeth.

'You may well warn me against such an evil. Human nature is so prone to fall into it! No, Lizzy, let me once in my life feel how much I have been to blame. I am not afraid of being overpowered by the impression. It will pass away soon enough.'[1]

Darcy and Mr. Gardiner were the only people who acted to any purpose; Darcy discovered where the lovers were hiding, insisted upon their marriage, took upon himself the burden of providing an income for Wickham, and behaved altogether in a preposterously generous manner. His generosity was revealed to none but the Gardiners, and those quiet observers gave him credit for 'another motive.' It became known a little later, by Lydia's want of reticence, that Darcy had been present at her wedding. This led Elizabeth to ask an explanation from Mrs. Gardiner; and the contents of Mrs. Gardiner's letter threw her into 'a flutter of spirits, in which it was difficult to determine whether pleasure or pain bore the greatest share.'

[1] II. xv. (xlviii.).

'Will you be very angry with me,' wrote Mrs. Gardiner, 'my dear Lizzy, if I take this opportunity of saying (what I was never bold enough to say before) how much I like him? . . . His understanding and opinions all please me; he wants nothing but a little more liveliness, and *that*, if he marry *prudently*, his wife may teach him. I thought him very sly; —he hardly ever mentioned your name. But slyness seems the fashion.'[1]

Mr. Collins's letter, when he heard the news, is known to all the world, and has helped him to add a word to the English language. But other letters, introduced into the novels, less known because not written in so broad a style of burlesque, are masterpieces. Such are Lady Bertram's in *Mansfield Park*, with its triple repetition of 'the poor invalid,' 'the poor sufferer,'[2] Lucy Steele's in *Sense and Sensibility*, Isabella Thorpe's in *Northanger Abbey*, Mary Musgrove's in *Persuasion*, and more than one of Mary Crawford's in *Mansfield Park*. The author could put herself into the place of any one of her creations at any moment, the character once conceived; and all the details followed naturally.

My dear Sir—I feel myself called upon, by your relationship, and my situation in life, to condole with you on the grievous affliction you are now suffering under, of which we were yesterday informed by a letter from Hertfordshire. . . . The death of your daughter would have been a blessing in comparison with this. . . . You are grievously to be pitied; in which opinion I am not only joined by Mrs. Collins, but likewise by Lady Catherine and her daughter, to whom I have related the affair. . . . For who, as Lady Catherine herself condescendingly says, will connect themselves with such a family? And this consideration

[1] II. xix. (lii.).

[2] A reader might not have guessed that Lady Bertram 'rather shone in the epistolary line,' if the author had not said so.

leads me to reflect, with augmented satisfaction, on a certain event of last November; for had it been otherwise, I must have been involved in all your sorrow and disgrace.[1]

If Mr. Bennet liked to have his sons-in-law ridiculous, he might even now regret Elizabeth's refusal of such a fool.

By hook or by crook, then, Wickham and Lydia were married, and Mrs. Bennet and her daughter had an opportunity for ill-behaviour of which they eagerly and vigorously availed themselves:—

> After a slight preparation for good news, the letter [from Mrs. Gardiner] was read aloud. Mrs. Bennet could hardly contain herself. . . .
>
> 'My dear, dear Lydia!' she cried; 'this is delightful indeed! She will be married! I shall see her again! She will be married at sixteen! My good, kind brother! . . . Well, I am so happy! In a short time I shall have a daughter married. "Mrs. Wickham!" How well it sounds! And she was only sixteen last June!'[2]

Mrs. Jennings would have taken such a piece of news very differently. As for Lydia, she was so delighted at being married, that she seemed to have forgotten how she came to be married.

The story goes on. Bingley returns to Netherfield. His return brought no comfort to Jane, especially as

[1] II. xv. (xlviii.). Authorities do not seem to be agreed as to what 'a Collins' means—merely a letter of thanks for hospitality, such as Mr. Collins (I. xxii. (xxii.)) intended to write, and doubtless did write, though it has not been preserved; or a letter full of gaucherie, conceit, and pompous impertinence (II. xv. (xlviii.) and II. xxiv. (lvii.)). But, as Mr. Collins would be certain to combine these qualities in any letter of thanks he might write, the problem may be left unsolved.

[2] II. xvi. (xlix.).

he was accompanied by Darcy, who to Jane was only the man whom her sister had rejected, but to Elizabeth a recent benefactor of her family, and the most interesting person in the world. The two gentlemen soon came to call at Longbourn. Bingley was agreeable and attentive to Jane; but Darcy was stiff and silent. She was disappointed, and angry with herself for being so.

'Why, if he came only to be silent, grave, and indifferent,' said she, 'did he come at all?' She could settle it in no way that gave her pleasure.

'He could be still amiable, still pleasing to my uncle and aunt, when he was in town; and why not to me? If he fears me, why come hither? If he no longer cares for me, why silent? Teasing, teasing man! I will think no more about him.'[1]

Bingley and Jane, easy lovers, are soon engaged; and nothing remains but to make the other lovers happy. To this consummation Lady Catherine contributes a visit at Longbourn in her very best style, which gave Elizabeth an opportunity for showing what she could do in the way of independence and well-deserved impertinence. Her courageous honesty prevails so far over Lady Catherine's insolence that, though the great lady quits her with the memorable words, 'I take no leave of you, Miss Bennet. I send no compliments to your mother. You deserve no such attention. I am seriously displeased,' she is forced to respect her. Lady Catherine was an odious character, but she was not a simpleton. She understood that she had met more than her match, and accepted total defeat.[2]

This scene, which I will not injure by abridgment,

[1] II. xxi. (liv.). [2] II. xxiii. (lvi.).

is the most brilliant in the novel—perhaps in all the novels. It will not lose by comparison with Mrs. Proudie's defeat by Mr. Crawley, or Mrs. Poyser's setting down of Squire Donnithorne.

It may be doubted whether it is quite in character to make Lady Catherine disclose to an upstart adventuress her own plan for Darcy's marriage with her daughter; she might have trusted to her heavy artillery without the aid of an appeal which, after all, was addressed to Elizabeth's generosity. But Lady Catherine's pride was destined to defeat itself, and her humiliation was only completed by the immolation of her daughter's self-respect.

No explanation is given why the reconciliation began. Elizabeth seems to have thought Darcy wounded by her violence, implacable against her relations, and yet strangely generous and forgiving. It was necessary for her to speak, being the only person in her family who could speak to the point. So the next move comes from herself, and there is a dramatic propriety in it, a fitting tribute to the pride of each. She took the opportunity of a visit from Darcy and Bingley, and a walk to Meryton, to form 'a desperate resolution . . .; and perhaps he might be doing the same.' She thanked him warmly for his kindness to her sister Lydia. Darcy was surprised, and 'sorry, exceedingly sorry' that his confidence should have been betrayed; but her speaking at all was a sign of goodwill. He took courage from it to address her again, and all misunderstandings came to an end.

The author's dislike of sentimentality, or her experience of love scenes in ordinary novels, makes her reticent

on such occasions as these. The scene is delicately drawn, but not ardently, though both the lovers are people of strong feeling; and if we look all the novels through, the only really ardent declaration is Captain Wentworth's in *Persuasion*, for Darcy's earlier wooing is almost a menace. Jane Austen does not deal in ardency. Hers is a pastoral muse, a muse that inhabits rectories and country houses, not a goddess of romance, dwelling in caverns and glaciers. The female philosophy of a hundred years ago was not passionate; it aimed at making the best of the institution of marriage, not disregarding income, station, and convention; it took sentiment by the way, and kept a tight hand over passion; and passion took its revenge in elopements and seductions. The women were tamer, the men wilder than they are represented in the fiction of the present day, whether or not it was really so.

But nothing can be more natural and satisfactory than the relation of mutual confidence at once established between Elizabeth and Darcy. If their love-making was not on the highest poetical levels it promised happiness, and the Brownings themselves could ask no more.

Mr. Bennet's letter to Mr. Collins on this occasion was short and to the purpose:—

> DEAR SIR—I must trouble you once more for congratulations. Elizabeth will soon be the wife of Mr. Darcy. Console Lady Catherine as well as you can. But, if I were you, I would stand by the nephew. He has more to give. Yours sincerely, etc.'[1]

The answer to this letter, unhappily, was never written; for Lady Catherine's anger was so loud and

[1] II. xxvii. (lx.).

formidable that Mr. and Mrs. Collins fled from it, and took refuge at Meryton with the Lucases. A reference to the previous chapter[1] will show that Mrs. Bennet was equal to the occasion.

It is the fashion now to end a book with a situation, an epigram, a cork flying from a bottle. The old leisurely way was to follow the characters into later life, and tell us what became of them. Jane Austen does not always tell us, but she knew. Readers of the letters will remember that Jane Austen saw 'a small portrait of Mrs. Bingley, excessively like her,' at the Exhibition in Spring Gardens,[2] and noticed that, as she had always supposed, green was a favourite colour with her. She could not see a portrait of her sister Elizabeth —she would very likely be in yellow—but on second thoughts she concludes :—

> I can only imagine that Mr. D. prizes any picture of her too much to like it should be exposed to the public eye. I can imagine he would have that sort of delicacy—that mixture of love, pride, and delicacy.[3]

Miss Bingley, since marriage did not seem to be her destiny, made it her rule to avoid quarrels and 'retain the right of visiting' at as many agreeable houses as possible, and Pemberley in particular. She had intended to marry Darcy without love; she parted from him without resentment.

Many readers will agree with Jane's estimate of Elizabeth, 'as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print.' Her 'impertinence' need not be apologised for, for its unexpected *à propos*, its cleverness and penetration make it one of her chief attractions. Even

[1] II. xxvi. (lix.). [2] Brabourne, ii. 139. [3] *Ibid.* 142.

if it is not always in perfect taste, it is more engaging than the finest tact. She cannot resist the temptation to say out what is in her mind. She was unguarded and imprudent. She was unguarded when she attacked Darcy for coming to the pianoforte to hear her play:—

'You mean to frighten me, Mr. Darcy, by coming in all this state to hear me. But I will not be alarmed, though your sister does play so well';[1]

which might have sounded like coquetry, and is too arch to please the modern taste; and more than imprudent when, in her indignation against Darcy for separating Jane and Bingley, she accused him point-blank of 'ruining, perhaps for ever, the happiness of a most beloved sister';[2] finally, and above all (as she felt later), when she threw herself upon his sympathy on receiving the news of her sister Lydia's elopement, and thereby showed an impulse most natural for a girl more than half in love, but not to be recommended as a precedent; tearing down her defences and exposing herself to the man whom hitherto she had treated with severity and even rudeness. But, as Mr. Bradley reminds us, she is a real person, and we must see her as well as hear her speak:—

That which, said seriously, is impertinent, need not be so if playfully said. . . . We forget to imagine the smile about her lips, and the dancing light in her eyes.[3]

This is excellent criticism, for it supplies to the portrait what the author herself implied and indicated, but did not think it necessary to insist upon.

[1] I. xxxi. (xxxi.). [2] II. i. (xxxiv.).

[3] *Essays and Studies*, by members of the English Association vol. ii. Clarendon Press, 1911.

This 'impertinence,' to use the word applied to it by Elizabeth herself, when discussing with Darcy the origin of his admiration for her, or 'liveliness,' as he prefers to call it, is a family characteristic. None of the five sisters was shy, unless it were Jane, if that is the right word to describe her gentle, retiring, and benignant disposition. 'She smiles too much,' was Darcy's comment upon her, one of innumerable touches which make up her portrait. Is it an outrage to hint that part of Elizabeth's temperament was derived from her mother? Warm feeling, impulsiveness, hasty judgments, and unconsidered speech were common to both; Mrs. Bennet's feelings, impulses, judgments, and speeches were generally wrong, Elizabeth's generally right; but there was as much likeness between mother and daughter as may exist between a lively and sensible woman and a lively fool. Likeness in unlikeness, a thing which may be daily observed in families, is often ignored by novelists. There is a family likeness in the Bennet sisters, as well as much unlikeness. But Elizabeth is her father's daughter in taste and intellect, as well as in possessing a strong critical judgment, merely humorous and cynical in him, but in her preserved by natural gaiety and companionableness from turning sour or bitter. I am not sure that she altogether disliked hours spent in the company of 'broadfaced stuffy uncle Philips, breathing port wine,' and Mrs. Philips, whose idea of pleasure was 'a nice comfortable noisy game of lottery-tickets, and a little bit of hot supper afterwards.' She despised the fluttering after officers which was the principal interest of her younger sisters; but she did not entirely avoid their company, when the fascinating

Wickham appeared among them. The Meryton world was small, but she was content to live in it. And indeed Jane's own letters to her sister Cassandra convey the impression that she too did not find the society of her inferiors intolerable. She was interested in all the gossip of her neighbourhood; nothing human was alien, and any collection of people waked her sympathy, and made human beings more and more interesting to her by self-revelation.

CHAPTER V

'MANSFIELD PARK'

OPINIONS will always be divided as to the comparative merits of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park*. Some of the best judges, Tennyson for instance, have preferred *Mansfield Park*; but the larger vote would be for *Pride and Prejudice*. There are in *Mansfield Park* no figures of such force as Darcy and Elizabeth, no grotesques like Lady Catherine and Mr. Collins, and one would be inclined to set Fanny Price and Edmund Bertram in the second rank, were it not known that the author herself placed them among her favourites. But on the other hand, Mrs. Norris is unsurpassed. She is more than a match for Mrs. Elton, Mrs. Jennings, and Mrs. Bennet; and Henry Crawford is more interesting than the Willoughbys, Wickhams, and Elliots, who are kept in the second line to disturb the peace of the principal characters and elope with the secondaries.

If *Pride and Prejudice* rises to higher levels of emotion than all the other novels, with the exception of *Persuasion*, *Mansfield Park* is of all, again excepting *Persuasion*, the freest from exaggeration. In other words, it is the

least dramatic; for the object of drama is to create situation, and its method to heighten lights and deepen shadows; the object of fiction is to delineate characters and motives, and its method to bring in, from every quarter and by any device, whatever may best help to develop the main subject and give both variety and continuity to the story by leading side streams into the main current. But what is gained in completeness may be lost in vividness, since to describe a situation is not the same thing as to present it. The reader comes to the event more prepared in the former case; when it occurs, it does not strike him so hard. Jane Austen never moves more freely than in dialogue; and she is able at certain moments to combine both methods, and to dramatise whilst she narrates. Among such moments are the notable conversation between Darcy and Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice*, the letter-writing scene in *Persuasion*, the revelation to Emma of Knightley's affections in *Emma* and to Elinor of Edward Ferrars's freedom in *Sense and Sensibility*, the visit of Henry Tilney to Fullerton in *Northanger Abbey*. She knows when she has said enough and may leave her actors to speak for themselves; her reticence helps the effect; and a like reticence may be observed in her abstinence from moralising. We soon tire of the pulpit. Jane Austen and Richardson preach by example; Thackeray, Fielding, George Eliot, Meredith combine this with precept, and the former method brings more conviction. '*Ne fueris hic tu*; don't be like Mrs. Norris or Mr. Collins,' is more potent medicine than pages of moralising. Instance is fresh, and precept is as stale as patience.

Mansfield Park begins, like *Sense and Sensibility*, with

a family history, and therefore with less of an exciting *lever de rideau* than some of the other novels. But there is no tedium in the narrative ; we are interested in the personages at once, and are prepared to find traces throughout the story of the coolness between the wealthy Bertrams and the needy Prices.

> Their homes were so distant, and the circles in which they moved so distinct, as almost to preclude the means of ever hearing of each other's existence during the eleven following years, or at least to make it very wonderful to Sir Thomas, that Mrs. Norris should ever have it in her power to tell them, as she now and then did in an angry voice, that Fanny had got another child.[1]

The remoteness and dignity of the head of the house, the nullity of Lady Bertram, the impertinence and meddlesomeness of Mrs. Norris, the helplessness of Mrs. Price are all there ; but who else would have put it this way? By the third page we know everybody, are quite at home at Mansfield Park, and may even begin to look forward to the final event.

Fanny Price, brought up in so large and so little esteemed a family as is here indicated, shy, modest, and delicate, is sent for to Mansfield Park to be adopted by her alarming relations, the Bertrams ; and 'afraid of everybody, ashamed of herself, and longing for the home she had left,' makes but a poor figure in a handsome, highly placed, and opulent family. The only person who takes any trouble to be kind to her is her cousin Edmund Bertram, Sir Thomas's second son, who found her sitting crying on the attic stairs.[2] The

[1] I. i. (i.). [2] I ii. (ii.).

family were long in discovering that she was the cleverest woman in the house; and Fanny herself, having a spirit as unlike as possible to Elizabeth Bennet's disposition, made it easy for them to misunderstand her. She was everybody's willing slave, and nobody's companion but Edmund's, and he was at Eton, and absent for most part of the year. The sisters, Maria and Julia, were too proud and selfish to notice her; Sir Thomas was given up to his own concerns, Lady Bertram was fast asleep, and the family was hustled, scolded, and managed by the odious Mrs. Norris, Lady Bertram's sister, and wife of the rector of Mansfield. On the death of her husband, five years later, Mrs. Norris moved from the Parsonage into a small house in the village. She 'consoled herself for the loss of her husband in considering that she could do very well without him; and for her reduction of income by the evident necessity of stricter economy.'[1]

It had been expected that Mrs. Norris would now take charge of Fanny; but Mrs. Norris had no such intention.

'Fanny live with me!' she says. 'The last thing in the world for me to think of, or for anybody to wish that really knows us both. Good heaven! what could I do with Fanny?—Me! a poor, helpless, forlorn widow, unfit for anything, my spirits quite broke down, what could I do with a girl at her time of life? . . . How came Sir Thomas to speak to you about it? . . . he could not say he *wished* me to take Fanny.'

'No. He only said he thought it very likely—and I thought so too. We both thought it would be a comfort to you. But if you do not like it, there is no more to be said.

[1] I. iii. (iii.).

She is no incumbrance here. . . . Then you will not mind living by yourself quite alone?'

'Dear Lady Bertram! what am I fit for but solitude? Now and then I shall hope to have a friend in my little cottage (I shall always have a bed for a friend). . . . If I can but make both ends meet, that's all I ask for.'

'I hope, sister, things are not so very bad with you neither—considering. Sir Thomas says you will have six hundred a year.'

'Lady Bertram, I do not complain. I know I cannot live as I have done, but I must retrench where I can, and learn to be a better manager. . . . My situation is as much altered as my income. . . . I *must* live within my income, or I shall be miserable; and I own it would give me great satisfaction to be able to do rather more—to lay by a little at the end of the year.'

'I daresay you will. You always do, don't you?'[1]

Mrs. Norris goes on to assure her sister that she only saves for the Bertrams; Lady Bertram, with unexpected promptness, bids her not trouble herself about them; and Mrs. Norris clenches the conversation by saying, 'Besides that, I should not have a bed to give her, for I must keep a spare room for a friend.'

That friend never came; we know that the spare rooms at the Parsonage had never been wanted, and it is to be doubted whether the spare room at the White House was even furnished, for we hear later that roses were put there to dry.

Parsimony pushed to the edge of dishonesty, general ill-nature indulged under colour of justice, insolent benevolence, respect of persons in the most odious form, domineering servility, pettiness, meddlesomeness, no power of distinguishing between things

[1] I. iii. (iii.).

important and unimportant, harsh treatment of inferiors, consistent ill-usage of her niece, Fanny Price, whose only offence was that she was not a Bertram, these are Mrs. Norris's characteristics. We should fly from her if she existed; as it is she makes excellent sport for us. It should, however, be set down to her credit that she had some affection for her elder nieces, and that, as she constantly reminds us, she never spared herself; but those whom she benefited against their will may sometimes have wished her a little of Lady Bertram's indolence.

Family likenesses and differences are not neglected by Jane Austen, though she has her own views about them. Mrs. Norris's ascendency over Lady Bertram is accounted for by the fact of her being the elder sister, as well as by her managing temper, and Lady Bertram's perfect placidity and indolence.

To the education of her daughters Lady Bertram paid not the smallest attention. She had not time for such cares. She was a woman who spent her days in sitting nicely dressed on a sofa, doing some long piece of needlework, of little use and no beauty, thinking more of her pug than her children, but very indulgent to the latter when it did not put herself to inconvenience, guided in everything of importance by Sir Thomas, and in smaller concerns by her sister. Had she possessed greater leisure for the service of her girls, she would probably have supposed it unnecessary, for they were under the care of a governess, with proper masters, and could want nothing more.' [1]

Edmund Bertram resembles his father, Sir Thomas, in solidity, good sense, and uninteresting propriety; his sweet temper may have come from his mother, who never took the trouble to be put out. Tom, the elder

[1] I. ii. (ii.).

son, is bustling and lively like Mrs. Norris, though his grace of manner was certainly not derived from her. Maria had something of Mrs. Norris's temper. Julia has no particular qualities, except good looks, fits of sulkiness and jealousy, and a disposition to matrimony.

As the Bertrams lived entirely in their own country house, and saw nothing of their neighbours, the incidents recorded are so few and so trifling that the absence of Sir Thomas Bertram on a voyage to Antigua, and the arrival at Mansfield Rectory of Henry Crawford, a young man of fortune, and his sister Mary, half-brother and sister of Mrs. Grant the Rector's wife, are facts of capital importance. Maria Bertram, the elder daughter, in her father's absence contracts a commonplace and satisfactory engagement with Mr. Rushworth, a neighbouring squire of wealth and position; Tom, the eldest son, who had been absent with his father in the West Indies, appears upon the scene and requires amusement. The races at B—— are going on, the Crawfords are staying with the Grants at Mansfield Parsonage. Thrown together in idleness and affluence, the Bertrams and Crawfords must be love-making. The question was, how they were to be paired off. Mary Crawford was divided in her aspirations. 'Matrimony was her object, provided she could marry well.' If Tom Bertram should be hard to catch, his brother Edmund might come into consideration; and Edmund was soon fascinated by the lively and intelligent Mary, while Tom had his own pleasures, and did not wish to be bound. Meanwhile Henry Crawford balanced between Maria and Julia Bertram, both of whom were half in love with him; for Maria's engagement to Mr. Rushworth gave her, she

thought, a secure position for flirting with Henry, and was no obstacle to a man of his temperament and principles. 'He is the most horrible flirt that can be imagined,' says his sister to Mrs. Grant.[1]

Poor Fanny was neglected by all; and no one perceived that her unconsidered heart had already been given to her cousin Edmund, and that the love-making, real or counterfeit, which was going on around her, was bitterness to her.

Jane Austen is never better than when describing a ball, a picnic, a strawberry party, a scene at the Rooms. She takes the reader behind the curtain, and shows him all the springs of action, the pleasures and pains of the actors, their motives, successes, and disappointments.

The season was 'the middle of a very late hay-harvest'; the weather fine, and the days at their longest. An expedition to Sotherton Court, Mr. Rushworth's place, ten miles from Mansfield, is described in full detail. The whole party, including Fanny Price, are packed into Henry Crawford's barouche, which he drives himself.

> The place of all places, the envied seat, the post of honour, was unappropriated. To whose happy lot was it to fall?[2]

It fell, rather by chance than choice, to Julia. 'Happy Julia! unhappy Maria!' Maria cared nothing for Mr. Rushworth, but a little for Henry, and a great deal for Sotherton; she began ill: but as during the long drive she had got over her disappointment about

[1] I. iv. (iv.). [2] I. viii. (viii.).

the box seat, 'the grandeur of Sotherton made up for everything.'

Mr. Rushworth, extinguished by his house and grounds, becomes the most insignificant figure in the company; the party disperse about the grounds, make appointments and forget them, and lose and find each other like the lovers in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*. Maria goes off with Henry Crawford, Mary Crawford with Edmund, Julia in search of the others; no one thinks of Mr. Rushworth, who comes up late, hot and vexed, to find Fanny sitting alone, as much deserted as himself. 'I think they might as well have stayed for me,' he says, and leaves her, like the others.

Fanny was the chief sufferer by this unconscious conspiracy of selfishness; 'disappointment and depression' is too often the portion of the unselfish. The morning thus spoilt, they return uncheered to dinner; and after 'a quick succession of busy nothings' set off for the ten miles drive home.'

Meanwhile Mrs. Norris

> . . . had found a morning of complete enjoyment—for the housekeeper, after a great many courtesies on the subject of pheasants, had taken her to the dairy, told her all about their cows, and given her the receipt for a famous cream cheese; and since Julia's leaving them they had been met by the gardener, with whom she had made a most satisfactory acquaintance, for she had set him right as to his grandson's illness, convinced him that it was an ague, and promised him a charm for it; and he, in return, had shown her all his choicest nursery of plants, and actually presented her with a very curious specimen of heath. . . .
>
> 'Well, Fanny, this has been a fine day for you, upon my word,' said Mrs. Norris, as they drove through the park. 'Nothing but pleasure from beginning to end! I am sure

you ought to be very much obliged to your Aunt Bertram and me for contriving to let you go. A pretty good day's amusement you have had! . . . There, Fanny, you shall carry that parcel for me—take great care of it—do not let it fall; it is a cream cheese, just like the excellent one we had at dinner. Nothing would satisfy that good old Mrs. Whitaker, but my taking one of the cheeses. I stood out as long as I could, till the tears almost came into her eyes, and I knew it was just the sort that my sister would be delighted with. That Mrs. Whitaker is a treasure! . . . Take care of the cheese, Fanny. Now I can manage the other parcel and the basket very well.' . . .

It was a beautiful evening, mild and still, and the drive was as pleasant as the serenity of Nature could make it; but when Mrs. Norris ceased speaking it was altogether a silent drive to those within. Their spirits were in general exhausted —and to determine whether the day had afforded most pleasure or pain might occupy the meditations of almost all.[1]

Notwithstanding his clerical vocation, for which she alternately teased and commended him, Mary Crawford perceived that her best chance was with Edmund, since there was not sufficient attraction either in herself or her twenty thousand pounds to draw Tom away from his pleasures. A new acquaintance of Tom Bertram, John Yates, the younger son of a peer, now came to Mansfield, 'on the wings of disappointment, and with his head full of acting';[2] for he had just come from a theatrical party at Lord Ravenshaw's place in Cornwall, broken up at the last moment by the death of a dowager.

Nothing would do but to act a play.

'To make you amends, Yates,' says Tom, 'I think we must raise a little theatre at Mansfield, and ask you to be our manager.'[3]

[1] I. x. (x.). [2] I. xiii. (xiii.). [3] *Ibid.*

So it turned out; in spite of the open opposition of Edmund, quietly aided by Fanny, enterprise carried the day against decorum, and as Lady Bertram made no opposition and Mrs. Norris was ready to manage everything, the scheme proceeded.

After much discussion of tragedy and comedy, action and sentiment, it is decided to try Mrs. Inchbald's drama of sentiment, *Lovers' Vows*. '*Lovers' Vows*!' says Tom. 'And why should not *Lovers' Vows* do for us as well as for the Ravenshaws? How came it never to be thought of before?' And *Lovers' Vows* it was, though neither Fanny nor Edmund could imagine how the ladies of the party could wish to act such a play.

The vanities, rivalries, tempers, and jealousies which commonly accompany theatricals are excellently described. Dull Mr. Rushworth's two-and-forty speeches and his blue and silver dress, Mr. Yates's bad acting, the growing sense that the play was too broad for the domestic stage, the enlargement of the party to include half the neighbourhood, Edmund's compliance with the scheme under Mary Crawford's smiles and frowns, Fanny's own unwilling acquiescence, are vividly set before us.

Outwardly all seems to be going well, though a cool observer like Mrs. Grant could see that all was going ill; and Fanny,

> . . . being always a very courteous listener, and often the only listener at hand, came in for the complaints and distresses of most of them. *She* knew that Mr. Yates was in general thought to rant dreadfully, that Mr. Yates was disappointed in Henry Crawford, that Tom Bertram spoke so quick he would be unintelligible, that Mrs. Grant spoiled everything by laughing, that Edmund was behindhand with his part,

and that it was a misery to have anything to do with Mr. Rushworth, who was wanting a prompter through every speech. . . . Everybody had a part either too long or too short;—nobody would attend as they ought,—nobody would remember on which side they were to come in,—nobody but the complainer would observe any directions.[1]

But what was worse, the discord between the two sisters, Maria and Julia, set up by Henry Crawford's preference, first of Julia to Maria, and now of Maria to Julia, grew deeper, as Maria fell more seriously in love with him; and at the same time Edmund's attentions to Mary Crawford became more marked, and more painful to their victim Fanny.

The unexpected return from Antigua of Sir Thomas Bertram, to sweep all away, is a brilliant incident. Unheralded, unannounced, he bursts in upon them.

How is the consternation of the party to be described? To the greater number it was a moment of absolute horror. Sir Thomas in the house![2]

The return of the master of the house sets them all at different angles. Almost all were guilty in different ways, and all were made uncomfortable by his presence; all but Lady Bertram, who was

. . . really extremely happy to see him. . . . She had no anxieties for anybody to cloud *her* pleasure; her own time had been irreproachably spent during his absence; she had done a great deal of carpet work, and made many yards of fringe; and she would have answered as freely for the good conduct and useful pursuits of all the young people as for her own.[3]

Lady Bertram breaks the ice by saying:—

'How do you think the young people have been amusing themselves lately, Sir Thomas? They have been acting. We have been all alive with acting.'

[1] I. xviii. (xviii.). [2] II. i. (xix.). [3] *Ibid.*

After this the crime had to be partially confessed; but Sir Thomas was allowed to discover for himself that his own room had been turned into the anteroom of a theatre. His meeting there with Mr. Yates in the midst of one of his speeches is known to all readers and too long to be quoted here. Tom Bertram was the only spectator; but he was also the only one of the family who had any humour.

It would be the last—in all probability—the last scene on that stage; but he was sure there could not be a finer. The house would close with the greatest *éclat*.[1]

So ended the theatricals, by the autocratic decision of Sir Thomas Bertram, *instans tyrannus*. But not so ended the agitations and expectations to which the rehearsals had given rise. Julia and Maria both in love with Henry Crawford, the party breaking up, and Henry Crawford taking his leave without a word of declaration to the engaged or the unengaged sister; Edmund in love with Mary Crawford, yet unable to approve much of her principles and actions; here was trouble enough brewing to disturb the observant Fanny, who saw all the mischief, but could not speak; and for her, Mary was preparing the cruellest of disappointments, in half inviting, half meeting Edmund's advances.

Henry Crawford was gone,—gone from the house, and within two hours afterwards from the parish; and so ended all the hopes his selfish vanity had raised in Maria and Julia Bertram.

Julia could rejoice that he was gone. His presence was beginning to be odious to her; and if Maria gained him not, she was now cool enough to dispense with any other revenge. She did not want exposure to be added to desertion.[2]

[1] II. i. (xix.). [2] II. ii. (xx.).

Sir Thomas, seeing that something was wrong, offered to release Maria from her engagement, if she were repenting on further knowledge of Mr. Rushworth. But Maria did not wish to make any change.

> She was in a state of mind to be glad that she had secured her fate beyond recall; that she had pledged herself anew to Sotherton . . . and retired in proud resolve. . . .[1]

Here is a picture of a bad woman; proud, self-willed, and pleasure-loving, with capacities of strength, but spoiled by indulgence, mismanagement, and neglect, and made incapable of a wise choice of good things by want of discipline. The author does not elaborate her moral; but the moral of this and of her books in general is the importance of *good principling*. The failure in the lives of Maria and Julia rests upon those who brought them up no less than on their own natures.

As Edmund was determined to be ordained, Mary Crawford made up her mind to leave off thinking about him.

> She was very angry with him. She had thought her influence more. She *had* begun to think of him—she felt that she had—with great regard, with almost decided intentions; but she would now meet him with his own cool feelings. . . . She would learn to match him in his indifference.[2]

It was, indeed, the revelation of a contest of wills. Mary had thought Edmund easy and manageable. She meant to arrange his life for him; and she was learning that where a principle was concerned it was possible for him to be firm.

A few days later Henry Crawford, having sent for his hunters to Mansfield, says:—

[1] II. iii. (xxi.). [2] II. v. (xxiii.).

'And how do you think I mean to amuse myself, Mary, on the days that I do not hunt? I am grown too old to go out more than three times a week; but I have a plan for the intermediate days, and what do you think it is?'

'To walk and ride with me, to be sure.'

'Not exactly, though I shall be happy to do both. . . . No, my plan is to make Fanny Price in love with me.'

'Fanny Price! Nonsense! No, no. You ought to be satisfied with her two cousins.'

'But I cannot be satisfied without Fanny Price, without making a small hole in Fanny Price's heart. You do not seem properly aware of her claims to notice. . . . You see her every day, and therefore do not notice it, but I assure you she is quite a different creature from what she was in the autumn. She was then merely a quiet, modest, not plain-looking girl, but she is now absolutely pretty. . . .'

'The truth is,' says Mary, 'that she was the only girl in company for you to notice, and you must have a somebody. . . . I do desire that you will not be making her really unhappy; a *little* love, perhaps, may animate and do her good; but I will not have you plunge her deep, for she is as good a little creature as ever lived, and has a great deal of feeling. . . .'

And without attempting any further remonstrance, she left Fanny to her fate.[1]

Fanny was doubly guarded—by her disapproval of Crawford, and by her love for Edmund; but Crawford attacked her on her weak side, affection for her brother William, and obliged her very soon to dislike him less than formerly. William, who had lately returned from sea, was staying at Mansfield. Crawford lent William one of his hunters, took him to London in his own chaise, and got him made a lieutenant.

Sir Thomas Bertram, wishing to please Fanny Price, conceived the idea of giving a dance at Mansfield. Her

[1] II. vi. (xxiv.).

cousins were away: she was to open the ball, the first ball at which she had ever been present. Lady Bertram sent her maid to help her to dress—too late, to be sure; but the attention was valued by Fanny and Lady Bertram herself much more than it deserved. 'Yes,' said Lady Bertram when Sir Thomas praised her looks, 'she looks very well. I sent Chapman to her. . . . Her happiness on this occasion was very much à la mortal, finely chequered,' for though she felt the ball 'to be indeed very charming, and was actually practising her steps about the drawing-room, as long as she could be safe from the notice of her Aunt Norris,' she was not free from care. She had to receive the guests, and to open the ball; and Henry Crawford engaged her for the first two dances; it was not to be avoided. Still she enjoyed the dance and her success; and when ordered to bed by Sir Thomas stopped at the entrance door, like the Lady of Branksome Hall,

'. . . one moment and no more,'[1] to view the happy scene, and take a last look at the five or six determined couples who were still hard at work—and then, creeping slowly up the principal staircase, pursued by the ceaseless country-dance, feverish with hopes and fears, soup and negus, sore-footed and fatigued, restless and agitated, yet feeling, in spite of everything, that a ball was indeed delightful.[2]

Henry Crawford, having begun love-making for amusement, went on in earnest. He fell really in love with Fanny, and determined to win her and marry her. But Fanny's two reasons against him remained as strong as ever. She was not moved from her resolution by his ardent wooing, nor by Mary's support of his suit,

[1] *Lay of the Last Minstrel* (I. xx.).
[2] II. x. (xxviii.).

nor by her uncle's displeasure. After a conversation with him, when Henry had formally declared himself—

'Am I to understand,' said Sir Thomas, after a few moments' silence, 'that you mean to *refuse* Mr. Crawford?'

'Yes, Sir.'

'Refuse him?'

'Yes, Sir.'

'Refuse Mr. Crawford! Upon what plea? For what reason?'

'I—I cannot like him, Sir, well enough to marry him.'

'This is very strange!' said Sir Thomas, in a voice of calm displeasure.[1]

And no one will wonder at Sir Thomas's displeasure, considering his character and the circumstances. 'Romantic delicacy was certainly not to be expected from him,' seeing that he had married his daughter to Mr. Rushworth and not repented of it. Sir Thomas, however, had too much kind feeling and good breeding to insist or bully. He only stipulated that Fanny should hear Mr. Crawford speak.

The interview was not soon over.

He was in love, very much in love. . . . He would not despair; he would not desist. . . . He knew not that he had a pre-engaged heart to attack. Of *that* he had no suspicion. . . . Must it not follow of course, that when he was understood he should succeed? He believed it fully. . . . A little difficulty to be overcome was no evil to Henry Crawford. He rather derived spirits from it. He had been apt to gain hearts too easily. His situation was new and animating.[2]

Fanny stood her ground. She acknowledged in her heart the change in Henry Crawford from 'the clandestine, insidious, treacherous admirer of Maria Bertram.

[1] III. i. (xxxii.). [2] III. ii. (xxxiii.).

. . . She must be courteous, and she must be compassionate. . . .' But accept his suit she could not and would not. Sir Thomas respected her decision, though he could not approve or understand it. Lady Bertram, incapable of understanding her reluctance, imagined that all was settled, and poured congratulations into an empty ear. As for Mrs. Norris, at Sir Thomas's desire, she left Fanny alone.

She only looked her increased ill-will. Angry she was, bitterly angry; but she was more angry with Fanny for having received such an offer than for refusing it.[1]

Edmund, unconscious of the pain he was causing, continued to make Fanny his confidante. He would have liked Henry Crawford to be connected with his family, both from regard for him and because such a connexion would bring himself nearer to Mary. It was hard for Fanny to have to listen to the man she loved pressing the claims of another, and pressing them because he was in love with that other's sister. Edmund could only know half of Fanny's reasons for refusing Crawford, since he had not the wit to guess the other half, so carefully hidden within her heart. He also flattered himself that her disinclination arose from the suddenness of Crawford's proposals. She must have time given her, and all would come right.

Edmund himself was a long time in coming to the point, and it is not quite clear what he was waiting for. . . . The situation, as he saw it, is described by him in a letter written to Fanny at Portsmouth from Mansfield Park,[2] when he had been staying in London for three weeks, and seeing Mary often. She was unwilling

[1] III. ii. (xxxiii.). [2] III. xiii. (xliv.).

to marry a clergyman who meant to live as a clergyman. She was balancing between the fashionable world and life in a parsonage, between preference of Edmund to other admirers, and dislike of a smaller income, less amusement, and less society than she had been used to.

Exception may be taken to the circumstance that no one ever suspected Fanny's love for Edmund. It is difficult to believe that no word or look or gesture or change of colour betrayed her. Was there ever a love-secret which no other woman guessed?

After many years' absence Fanny went to Portsmouth to spend two months with her family, in all the noise, bustle, dirt, and discomfort of a squalid home, only redeemed by the slatternly good humour, good looks, and good health of the family, and the congenial character of her sister Susan, a girl of fourteen, sensible and capable, but no favourite of her mother's. Here she had an unexpected visit from Henry Crawford; and it may be believed that what he saw at Portsmouth, though it did not ruffle the suavity of his manners, may have made him think more seriously than before of what he was undertaking in proposing to marry, not Lady Bertram's daughter, but her penniless niece, with such a family on her back!

The dangerous illness of Tom Bertram brings in other hopes and fears to agitate Mary Crawford. Suppose Tom were to die? She actually writes to Fanny:

> I need not say how rejoiced I shall be to hear that there has been any mistake, but the report is so prevalent, that I confess I cannot help trembling. To have such a fine young man cut off in the flower of his days is most melancholy. Poor Sir Thomas will feel it dreadfully. I really am quite

agitated on the subject. Fanny, Fanny, I see you smile and look cunning, but upon my honour I never bribed a physician in my life. Poor young man!—If he is to die, there will be *two* poor young men less in the world; and with a fearless face and bold voice would I say to any one that wealth and consequence could fall into no hands more deserving of them. It was a foolish precipitation last Christmas, but the evil of a few days may be blotted out in part. Varnish and gilding hide many stains. It will be but the loss of the Esquire after his name. . . . I put it to your conscience, whether 'Sir Edmund' would not do more with all the Bertram property than any other possible 'Sir.'[1]

This letter did away with Fanny's last illusions, if she had any left, as regards Mary Crawford. Worse was to come. Henry returned no more to Portsmouth. He went to Richmond, where he met, and probably knew he should meet, Maria Rushworth; Fanny's next news was brought by an agitated letter from Mary, which hinted at a scandal, and the following morning her father held out to her the newspaper in which she read that the beautiful Mrs. R. of Wimpole Street had 'quitted her husband's roof in company with the well-known and captivating Mr. C., the intimate friend and associate of Mr. R.'[2]

Fanny seemed to herself never to have been shocked before. There was no possibility of rest. The evening passed without a pause of misery, the night was totally sleepless. . . . A woman married only six months ago, a man professing himself devoted, even *engaged*, to another—that other her near relation—the whole family, both families, connected as they were by tie upon tie, all friends, all intimate together!—it was too horrible a confusion of guilt, too gross a complication of evil! . . . Yet, her judgment told her it was so. . . . Miss Crawford's letter stamped it a fact.[3]

[1] III. xiv. (xlv.). [2] III. xv. (xlvi.). [3] *Ibid.*

A letter from Edmund a few days later brought another blow—Julia Bertram had eloped with Yates. 'At any other time,' he wrote, 'this would have been felt dreadfully. Now it seems nothing.' But the same letter gave the news that Edmund was coming to Portsmouth to pick her up on his way to Mansfield.[1]

Not even here can our authoress abstain from noting the whimsical contrasts and compatibilities of life; Fanny's sense of happiness and relief while so many were miserable; her joy at nearing home; Susan's delight at going with her to stay three months at Mansfield—'if she could help rejoicing from beginning to end, it was as much as ought to be expected from human virtue at fourteen'; her alarm about 'old vulgarisms and new gentilities . . . silver forks, napkins and finger-glasses'; and, to crown all, Fanny's reception by Lady Bertram.

> Lady Bertram came from the drawing-room to meet her; came with no indolent step; and falling on her neck, said, 'Dear Fanny! Now I shall be comfortable!'[2]

It is hard to say who was most to be pitied when the disastrous news reached Mansfield Park. Sir Thomas Bertram bore it as well as was possible for a proud man to bear such a blow to his pride; the author's analysis of his character on this occasion brings out its strong as well as weak parts. 'Sir Thomas, poor Sir Thomas, a parent, and conscious of errors in his own conduct as a parent, was the longest to suffer.'[3] He accused himself of selfishness and worldly wisdom, of ill-judged severity to his daughters, the harm

[1] III. xv. (xlvi.). [2] *Ibid.* [3] III. xvii. (xlviii.).

of which was aggravated, not counteracted, by Mrs. Norris's excessive indulgence and flattery; 'he feared that principle, active principle, had been wanting. . . . They had been instructed theoretically in their religion, but never required to bring it into daily practice.' He was upright, generous, proud, self-confident; his virtues had not saved him from domestic ruin, he saw that he had erred. But the repentance of parents usually comes too late for amendment. Sir Thomas's repentance was probably more enduring than Mr. Bennet's on a similar occasion; but he was not inconsolable; and the improved conduct of his eldest son, the happy marriage of Edmund and Fanny, and the hardly less happy removal of Mrs. Norris, did much to restore his self-comfort. For Mrs. Norris resolved to quit Mansfield, and

> . . . devote herself to her unfortunate Maria . . . in another country, remote and private, where, shut up together with little society, on one side no affection, on the other no judgment, it may be reasonably supposed that their tempers became their mutual punishment.[1]

The story now runs to an end. Edmund describes his last conversation with Mary Crawford, in which he had moralised upon her want of proper feeling in a tone and to a length which made her cry, 'A pretty good lecture, upon my word. Was it part of your last sermon?'[2] He had left her without a farewell word in spite of the impulse to go back and say good-bye—some detraction, surely, from Edmund's character either for sense or sensibility; for if he could be so suddenly convinced of the mistake he had made in

[1] III. xvii. (xlviii.). [2] III. xvi. (xlvii.).

Mary Crawford, why had he not seen it sooner? Having made the mistake, did no responsibility attend it?

After this we read without emotion that

> . . . exactly at the time when it was quite natural that it should be so, and not a week earlier, Edmund did cease to care about Miss Crawford, and became as anxious to marry Fanny as Fanny herself could desire.[1]

The most interesting—the most 'intricate'—people in *Mansfield Park* are the Crawfords. The other characters, with the splendid exception of Mrs. Norris, are specimens of more or less common types. The Crawford brother and sister resemble each other in good looks, good manners, and sufficient fortune. They are welcome wherever they go; not only from their external graces, but because they are benevolent, though their benevolence does not go deep. It was Henry Crawford who, during dinner at Sotherton, took particular pains to restore general good humour, when the fatigue and mistakes of the long hot day had ruffled more than one temper. His kindness to William Price was not all meant for Fanny, it gave him pleasure to be thoughtful and generous. His amiable character won the heart of Sir Thomas Bertram, who was at first disposed to keep him at a distance.

The kindliness of the Crawfords wins them good-will, not their virtues, for though they are without vicious inclinations, they have no standard of right and wrong, noble and ignoble. They prefer the easy path in everything, and make it easier still for those who would go with them. The precise, clergymanly Edmund, against his principles and inclination, takes a part

[1] III. xvii. (xlviii.).

in *Lovers' Vows* because Mary wishes it. She is the only person who understands the difficulty of Fanny's position at Mansfield, half adopted daughter, half companion, and who speaks a soothing word when Fanny is pestered by her cousins to take part in the theatricals, and insulted by Mrs. Norris for not yielding. Mary is not 'nice' in her wishes and ambitions; too ready to marry any young man with enough fortune and position; but though a schemer, she has too much honesty—or incautiousness—to keep her schemes to herself. All her good feeling comes out in discussing Fanny with her brother; and the mutual confidence and sincerity of brother and sister is most attractive. That relation was always tenderly regarded by Jane Austen.

What was wanting in both was, first, depth of nature, secondly, good principling in early life; and this latter consideration is, as I said above, the serious moral of the whole work. Mary is the stronger character of the two, and it is easy to see that her life would end either in hard-hearted celibacy—for she did not have many offers—or hard-hearted matrimony with a 'flirt' always at hand. Yet Mary Crawford had more heart than her brother. His facility and agreeableness made it impossible for him to know himself, even if he could wish it; for as he was always welcomed and forgiven whatever he did, how could he be severe with himself? He had lost his chance. Fanny saw the weak point. But from several earlier indications we surmise that he might have won Fanny at last, and this is more plainly stated towards the end of the book.

Henry Crawford, ruined by early independence and bad domestic example, indulged in the freaks of a cold-blooded vanity a little too long. Once it had, by an opening undesigned and unmerited, led him into the way of happiness. Could he have been satisfied with the conquest of one amiable woman's affections, could he have found sufficient exultation in overcoming the reluctance, in working himself into the esteem and tenderness of Fanny Price, there would have been every probability of success and felicity for him. His affection had already done something. Her influence over him had already given him some influence over her. . . . Would he have deserved more . . . would he have persevered, and uprightly, Fanny must have been his reward—and a reward very voluntarily bestowed—within a reasonable period from Edmund's marrying Mary.[1]

If so, so much the worse for Fanny. To have transferred her affection from Edmund to Henry, to have accepted, after so much talk of principle, a man of Henry's easy morality, would have made her less interesting as well as less virtuous. 'Would he have persevered, *and uprightly*'—in these words lies the secret of the Crawfords' failure, and I could wish Jane Austen had not lowered Fanny to the possibility of a marriage with Henry. No; it would have been better than this that Edmund should marry Mary and be dragged down by her, and Fanny go on helping Lady Bertram in her work. She had been so clear-sighted in perceiving the want of proper feeling and sincerity in the brother and sister that it is hard to believe she could ever have so completely condoned it.

[1] III. xvii. (xlviii.).

CHAPTER VI

'EMMA'

It is unsafe to draw conclusions from dates of composition. *Emma* is almost contemporaneous with *Persuasion*;[1] but the tone of the one is that of merry comedy, in the other sentiment prevails over comedy. They are the latest of Jane Austen's published works; one might have taken *Emma* to be among the earliest.

> You are now collecting your people delightfully, getting them exactly into such a spot as is the delight of my life. Three or four families in a country village is the very thing to work on.[2]

So wrote Jane Austen to a niece who was engaged upon a novel. The words might have been written to describe the scenes in which the story of *Emma* takes place. Emma was one of the author's favourite characters, though she said, when beginning to write the book,[3] 'I am going to take a heroine whom no one but myself will much like'—but the first words of the book predispose the reader in her favour:—

> Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite

[1] *Emma*, 1814–1815; *Persuasion*, 1815–1816.
[2] Brabourne, ii. 312. [3] *Ibid.*

some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her.[1]

The cheerful vein in which the story is begun continues throughout. The movement of the piece is *allegro con brio*; there are no distressing problems, no tragic characters or incidents; the atmosphere of light comedy and good spirits pervades all; no one is very rich or very poor, very high-flown, romantic, serious, cross, or melancholy; the story passes in a circle of two miles, among people who see each other every day and talk of nothing but small village incidents; and yet the interest never flags, nor do we ever wish to get away from our company, except when Mrs. Elton crosses the stage; then we would willingly escape, but remember that in so small a society as Highbury escape is impossible.

Emma is the younger of the two daughters of an amiable valetudinarian widower, Mr. Woodhouse, of Hartfield, near the large and populous village of Highbury. 'The Woodhouses were first in consequence there. All looked up to them.' We are told that Mr. Woodhouse married late, and it is not too bold a conjecture that he would never have married at all if Emma's mother had not insisted upon it. We hear little of Mrs. Woodhouse, but it is hinted she was the only person able to cope with Emma, and that Emma inherited her mother's capacities, one of which, no doubt, was that of match-making; from her father she can have inherited nothing but the prospect of succeeding to his estate. Her devotion to him, combined with complete detachment from any influence of his mind on hers, is

[1] I. i. (i.).

an illustration of the common fact that affection and likeness often have little to do with each other. Mr. Woodhouse's range of interests and pleasures is amazingly small; he never stirs beyond the grounds of Hartfield, his comfortable home, except to take a short drive in his carriage, a form of exercise which usually makes him nervous, or would, if he were not convinced that his coachman James is as completely to be trusted as his other servants, his daughter, his doctor Mr. Perry, and all his neighbours. But ridiculous as this decrepit Pantaloon is, and is meant to be, we should be sorry for any one who could read *Emma* and not love Mr. Woodhouse, though to live with him would be intolerable, and was not easy even for Emma. Mr. Woodhouse was as diffident of his own powers as Miss Bates herself:—

'Ah,' he says, 'it is no difficulty to see who you take after. Your dear mother was so clever at all those things. If I had but her memory! But I can remember nothing; not even that particular riddle which you have heard me mention; I can only recollect the first stanza; and there are several.' Emma reminds her father that they had it written out and that it is by Garrick.

'Ay, very true:—I wish I could recollect more of it—

Kitty, a fair but frozen maid.

The name makes me think of poor Isabella; for she was very near being christened Catherine after her grandmamma. I hope we shall have her here next week. Have you thought, my dear, where you will put her, and what room there will be for the children?'[1]

And so he rambles on.

Every one is familiar with Mr. Woodhouse's 'My dear Emma, suppose we all have a little gruel,'[2] his

[1] I. ix. (ix.). [2] I. xii. (xii.).

opinion (agreeing with Mr. Perry's) about the unwholesomeness of sea air; his dictum, 'the sooner every party breaks up the better'; his objection to marriages in general, but especially that of 'poor Miss Taylor,' Emma's governess and almost elder sister—'Pray, my dear, do not make any more matches; they are silly things, and break up one's family circle grievously.'[1]

He is at his best when the supper table is 'set out and moved forwards to the fire.'

> Mrs. Bates, let me propose your venturing on one of these eggs; an egg boiled very soft is not unwholesome. Serle understands boiling an egg better than anybody. I would not recommend an egg boiled by anybody else—but you need not be afraid, they are very small, you see—one of our small eggs will not hurt you.[2]

Miss Taylor has married a neighbour of the Woodhouses, Mr. Weston of Randalls, and almost all the action of the story, if it can be called action, takes place in one or other of the two houses, Hartfield and Randalls, half a mile apart.

Donwell Abbey, the nearest considerable house to Hartfield and Randalls, belonged to Mr. George Knightley, one of the chief personages of the novel, whose younger brother John had married Isabella Woodhouse, Emma's sister. Mr. Knightley is described as a tall, good-looking man of thirty-seven, with a loud voice and hearty manner; he may also be noted as having higher feeling, keener observation, and finer tact than any one in the book. These are the central characters; the others take their part in the intricate figures of the

[1] I. i. (i.). [2] I. iii. (iii.).

dance, receding at the climax to give way to the principals who open the ball in the first chapter.

Among all the personages of the drama Knightley is almost the only character about whom there is no suspicion of farce. His friendship for Emma is perfect, even if it were not meant to be crowned by love; and the growth of love between him and Emma, her unconsciousness and his modesty, are delicately and beautifully indicated. He is a rare lover who finds fault with his mistress because he cannot bear her to be imperfect, and she a happy woman who can submit to it because she knows he is always right. But it requires insight and boldness to imagine and draw such a relation.

Emma, thus situated, has little to do but to amuse herself; for, like most of Jane Austen's characters, she has almost no duties, and few occupations, in a society the idleness of which would not be endured for a day by our bustling age. Having little to do, she finds occupation and amusement in imagining and planning matches for her unmarried friends. For a sensible woman she has an extraordinary power of making mistakes in such things; and if after she married Mr. Knightley she made better guesses about her neighbours' love affairs, we may be pretty sure that it was owing in great measure to her husband's good sense. The story is a succession of blunders, the comedy of errors is carried beyond probability; and yet Emma is never ridiculous, because she is ingenuous and does not play tricks with her own honesty.

Emma's first essay in match-making is made for a protégée, Harriet Smith, a natural daughter of somebody, whom Emma romantically supposed to be a

nobleman, but who was no more than a well-to-do tradesman. The girl herself, a parlour boarder at Mrs. Goddard's school in the village of Highbury, was ready to be contented with the addresses of Robert Martin, a farmer and millowner of the neighbourhood; but Emma disdained such a connexion, and destined Harriet for Mr. Elton, the vicar of Highbury, a new-comer in high favour with all his parish.

I confess that I never could like the Harriet-Elton episode; the portrait, the charade, Emma's artifices to bring the imagined lovers together, the silliness of Harriet, the pertness of Emma, the tiny chequer-work of interests which must have seemed petty, even at Highbury.

Emma, who never sees what is going on under her nose, is not aware that Mr. Elton's attentions are meant for herself, not for Harriet, for whom he had not a thought. Meantime Harriet's easy affection is transferred from Robert Martin to Mr. Elton. 'Having once begun to be in love she would always continue so.'

But Mr. Elton made himself ridiculous by suddenly declaring his love to Emma one evening when he happened to be shut up with her in her father's carriage, and she could not escape. He is furious at being rejected, and goes off to Bath, where he picks up the vulgarest woman to be found in Jane Austen's pages (which is saying a good deal); and Harriet's prospect of happiness is again spoilt. But another young man appears on the scene, who creates expectations on all sides. This is Frank Churchill, the son of the good-humoured Mr. Weston by his first wife. Frank Weston had been adopted by his mother's brother, Mr. Churchill, and had taken his

name. The plot here becomes complicated; for while Emma was scheming to provide Harriet with a lover, she was in some danger of losing her own heart to the agreeable and desirable Frank Churchill. She herself entertained no doubt of being in love; 'her ideas only varied as to how much.' She was even more convinced that Frank Churchill was in love with herself; her apprehension and embarrassment were all for him. And all the while that Frank Churchill was dangling after Emma he was playing a double game, being secretly engaged to Jane Fairfax, a young lady who paid occasional visits to her grandmother and aunt, Mrs. and Miss Bates. Frank Churchill's attentions to Emma were enough to allow all Highbury to think that he was making love to her; his object in doing so was to conceal his connexion with Jane—a stratagem for which he is too easily forgiven by all parties concerned, and by the author herself.

An adventure with gipsies, from whom Frank Churchill, like a knight-errant, delivered the distressed damsel Harriet Smith, suggested to the 'imaginist' Emma (what a good word!) a possible and most desirable sequel. She herself had by this time got over her inclination to Frank Churchill. 'Frank,' she thought, 'was wishing to get the better of his attachment to herself, and Harriet just recovering from her mania for Mr. Elton.' Frank should marry Harriet. What could be more suitable? Alas for the blinded Emma! She never saw that Harriet's reticence about Frank Churchill was a sign that her mind was occupied otherwise. Harriet's susceptible heart had flown to meet the imagined affection of no less a person than Mr. Knightley!

Emma suspects nothing, says nothing; she had settled that Harriet was to be in love with Frank Churchill, and looked no further. Harriet on her part thought that her meaning was clear to Emma; and so the two go on side by side in mutual misunderstanding till Frank's engagement to Jane Fairfax becomes known. Then, to Emma's astonishment and dismay, Harriet, on hearing the news, not only showed no signs of distress, but had the audacity to make the astonishing, the impossible revelation that she was in love with Knightley herself.

The passage which follows is one of the best things Jane Austen ever wrote :—

> Harriet was standing at one of the windows. Emma turned round to look at her in consternation, and hastily said—
>
> 'Have you any idea of Mr. Knightley's returning your affection?'
>
> 'Yes,' replied Harriet modestly, but not fearfully—'I must say that I have.'
>
> Emma's eyes were instantly withdrawn; and she sat silently meditating, in a fixed attitude, for a few minutes. A few minutes were sufficient for making her acquainted with her own heart. A mind like hers, once opening to suspicion, made rapid progress. She touched, she admitted, she acknowledged the whole truth. Why was it so much worse that Harriet should be in love with Mr. Knightley than with Frank Churchill? Why was the evil so dreadfully increased by Harriet's having some hope of a return? It darted through her with the speed of an arrow that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself![1]

Emma's convictions, however hasty and transient, are intuitive and sincere; they come direct from feeling, not thinking.

[1] III. xi. (xlvii.).

Immediately upon this inconvenient event follows Emma's condemnation of herself, and it is severe enough. One of the most engaging parts of her character is her candour when again and again she finds that her fancy, 'that very dear part of Emma,' had led her astray; and that she is never made unkind or unjust by discovery of her own blunders.

She was most sorrowfully indignant; ashamed of every sensation but the one revealed to her—her affection for Mr. Knightley. Every other part of her mind was disgusting.

With insufferable vanity had she believed herself in the secret of everybody's feelings; with unpardonable arrogance proposed to arrange everybody's destiny. . . . She had brought evil on Harriet, on herself, and, she too much feared, on Mr. Knightley.[1]

Emma's penance was to be the hearing of Mr. Knightley's delusion from his own mouth, if indeed it were possible that he had been so deluded as to think of marrying Harriet. But as some antidote for this pain she recurs to a resolution not uncommonly made by young women, at least in fiction.

Marriage, in fact, would not do for her. . . . Nothing should separate her from her father. She would not marry, even if she were asked by Mr. Knightley.[2]

They met. His manner seemed to her constrained.

They walked together. He was silent. She thought he was often looking at her, and trying for a fuller view of her face than it suited her to give.[3]

She soon learned that his embarrassment was on her account, lest she should have suffered from the unscrupulous pursuit of the 'abominable scoundrel' Frank

[1] III. xi. (xlvii.). [2] III. xii. (xlviii.). [3] III. xiii. (xlix.).

Churchill. Had he a right to speak so? It is a delicate question. He was sixteen years older, he had always been an adviser and protector, he might take the liberty of a friend. But he was also, though she knew it not, her lover, he was younger in heart than in years, he must have hoped to rise on the ruins of Frank Churchill. At any rate Emma was very willing to excuse him when she found her own opportunity of rising upon the imaginary ruins of Harriet Smith; and conventions of behaviour melt away when reality is touched.

'Time, my dearest Emma, time will heal the wound.' She makes haste to tell him that there is no wound to heal; but she dreads a worse wound than that which he had imagined. 'They seemed to be within half a sentence of Harriet, and her immediate feeling was to avert the subject if possible.' He breaks in:—

'Emma, I must tell you what you will not ask, though I may wish it unsaid the next moment.'

'O, then, don't speak it, don't speak it,' she eagerly cried. 'Take a little time, consider, do not commit yourself.'[1]

Thus she checks him, but in a moment she encourages him to go on, offers herself as a friend, and will hear anything he may wish to say to her:—

'As a friend!' repeated Mr. Knightley. 'Emma, that I fear is a word—No, I have no wish—Stay, yes, why should I hesitate?—I have gone too far already for concealment.—Emma, I accept your offer. Extraordinary as it may seem, I accept it, and refer myself to you as a friend.—Tell me, then, have I no chance of ever succeeding?'

He stopped in his earnestness to look the question, and the expression of his eyes overpowered her.[2]

[1] III. xiii. (xlix.). [2] *Ibid.*

She had expected a declaration of love for Harriet Smith. She learns that it is she herself who is beloved.

> This one half-hour had given to each the same precious certainty of being beloved, had cleared for each the same degrees of ignorance, jealousy, or distrust.[1]

Never was a happier love-scene written. The play of natural feelings in a complex situation is perfectly given; with the characteristic quality of conveying to the last moment a doubt as to what the event may be. But there are indications throughout the three volumes, visible to those who can see, of Mr. Knightley's attachment to Emma, which shows itself, amongst other things, in his jealousy and dislike of Frank Churchill; and on her side in the pleasure she takes whenever Mr. Knightley shows himself at his best, without the elder-brother air, which, however, suits him admirably, and helps to make him perhaps the most attractive of Jane Austen's heroes.

Mrs. Elton is intolerable. We suffer from her presence in *Emma* almost as we should suffer, as Mr. Knightley did suffer, from her presence in person. A small specimen of her is enough:—

> Jane Fairfax is absolutely charming, Miss Woodhouse.—I quite rave about Jane Fairfax.—A sweet, interesting creature. So mild and ladylike—and with such talents!—I assure you I think she has extraordinary talents. I do not scruple to say that she plays extremely well. I know enough of music to speak decidedly on that point. O! she is absolutely charming! You will laugh at my warmth—but, upon my word, I talk of nothing but Jane Fairfax.—And her situation is so calculated to affect one!—Miss Woodhouse, we must exert ourselves and endeavour to do

[1] III. xiii. (xlix).

something for her. (This 'something, by the by, turns out after all to be no more than the procuring of a situation as governess in the family of a friend of Mrs. Elton, a most 'liberal and elegant' nursery establishment) We must bring her forward. Such talents as hers must not be suffered to remain unknown.—I daresay you have heard those charming lines of the poet—

> Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
> And waste its fragrance on the desert air.

We must not allow them to be verified in sweet Jane Fairfax![1]

Emma hints that Jane was probably contented with the attention she had received from people at Highbury, who have known her longer than Mrs. Elton:—

> My dear Miss Woodhouse, a vast deal may be done by those who dare to act. You and I need not be afraid. If *we* set the example, many will follow it as far as they can; though all have not our situations.[2]

Now, to put it on a level suitable to Mrs. Elton's understanding, and setting aside income, Emma was the daughter of the squire, a person of settled position in the county, and indisputably the first in Highbury; Mrs. Elton was the parson's wife, and a new-comer. The presumption of claiming equality with Emma was portentous. Mrs. Elton goes on—'*We* have carriages to fetch and convey her home, and *we* live in a style which could not make the addition of Jane Fairfax, at any time, the least inconvenient.'

We cannot escape from Mrs. Elton, and she pervades all three volumes; vulgar and patronising, and arch as well as impertinent.

What did Mrs. Elton become when she came to have no longer the excuse of youth? We may hope that she

[1] II. xv. (xxxiii.). [2] *Ibid.*

disappeared from the scene before that, or at least from Highbury. For, as the author says, *à propos* of Mrs. Churchill's death,

> Goldsmith tells us that when lovely woman stoops to folly, she has nothing to do but to die; and when she stoops to be disagreeable, it is equally to be recommended as a clearer of ill-fame. Mrs. Churchill, after being disliked at least twenty-five years, was now spoken of with compassionate allowance.[1]

The veil is torn away from conventional condolence; but at the same time it is made clear that conventional condolence is not only unavoidable but proper. Jane Austen indeed is no enemy to convention, but she did not confound the reality with the pretence, and so far she is cynical. But, alas! if that is cynicism, all raillery, satire, irony, is cynical; and nothing is left but the false sentimental and the humdrum.

One of the most notable creations of Jane Austen is the gossiping, benevolent, inconsequent, everlastingly talkative Miss Bates. Jane Austen, as we know from her way of speaking of her neighbours in her letters to her sister Cassandra, or when describing and putting in motion the other more real people whom she created, was grateful to the fellow-creatures who gave her so much amusement. But she loves Miss Bates because she is lovable, though she allows the impatient Emma to be intolerant to her inconsequent garrulity, her 'dreadful gratitude,' and indiscriminate praises.

Many readers have been amused, some have been bored, by Miss Bates. No one denies that there is but one Miss Bates, and that she has no second. But it

[1] III. ix. (xlv.).

may be doubted whether all those who have read her discursions have also attended to what the author says of her at the beginning of the book, since she does not appear effectively till the middle of the second volume. Miss Bates, who was

> . . . neither young, handsome, rich, nor married . . . stood in the very worst predicament in the world, for having much of the public favour; and she had no intellectual superiority to make atonement to herself, or frighten those who might hate her into outward respect. She had never boasted either beauty or cleverness. Her youth had passed without distinction, and her middle of life was devoted to the care of a failing mother, and the endeavour to make a small income go as far as possible. And yet she was a happy woman, and a woman whom no one named without good-will. It was her own universal good-will and contented temper which worked such wonders. She loved everybody, was interested in everybody's happiness, quick-sighted to everybody's merits, thought herself a most fortunate creature, and surrounded with blessings in such an excellent mother, and so many good neighbours and friends, and a home that wanted for nothing.[1]

Want of discrimination is a great blemish, and Miss Bates is as ready to be patronised by Mrs. Elton as by Emma; she is entirely ignorant of her niece Jane Fairfax's feelings, when the circumstances of the story compel her to accept a situation as governess, pressed upon her by Mrs. Elton: people and things crowd into her mind in a muddle without sequence or relativity, and are poured forth in a flood of talk. Let her speak for a moment—it will be a long moment, for Miss Bates must always have her say: the occasion is Mrs. Weston's dance at the Crown.

[1] I. iii. (iii.).

Miss Bates and Miss Fairfax, escorted by the two gentlemen, walked into the room; and Mrs. Elton seemed to think it as much her duty as Mrs. Weston's to receive them. Her gestures and movements might be understood by any one who looked on like Emma; but her words, everybody's words, were soon lost under the incessant flow of Miss Bates, who came in talking, and had not finished her speech under many minutes after her being admitted into the circle at the fire. As the door opened she was heard—

'So very obliging of you!—No rain at all. Nothing to signify. I do not care for myself. Quite thick shoes. And Jane declares—Well!' (as soon as she was within the door) 'well! this is brilliant indeed! This is admirable! Excellently contrived, upon my word. Nothing wanting. Could not have imagined it. So well lighted up! Jane, Jane, look! did you ever see anything——? O, Mr. Weston, you must really have had Aladdin's lamp. Good Mrs. Stokes would not know her own room again. I saw her as I came in; she was standing in the entrance. "O, Mrs. Stokes," said I—but I had not time for more.' She was now met by Mrs. Weston. 'Very well, I thank you, ma'am. I hope you are quite well. Very happy to hear it. . . . Delighted to hear it indeed! Ah! dear Mrs. Elton, so obliged to you for the carriage!—excellent time. Jane and I quite ready. Did not keep the horses a moment.' [They had been forgotten by the Eltons, and had had to wait.] 'Most comfortable carriage. O! and I am sure our thanks are due to you, Mrs. Weston, on that score. Mrs. Elton had most kindly sent Jane a note, or we should have been.—But two such offers in one day! Never were such neighbours. I said to my mother, "Upon my word, ma'am." Thank you, my mother is remarkably well. Gone to Mr. Woodhouse's. I made her take her shawl,—for the evenings are not warm—her large new shawl!—Mrs. Dixon's wedding present. So kind of her to think of my mother! . . . Ah! here's Miss Woodhouse. Dear Miss Woodhouse, how do you do?—Very well, I thank you, quite well. This is meeting quite in fairyland. Such a transformation! Must not compliment, I know' (eyeing Emma most complacently)—'that would be rude; but upon my word, Miss Woodhouse, you do look—

how do you like Jane's hair? You are a judge. She did it all herself. Quite wonderful how she does her hair! No hairdresser from London, I think, could.—Ah! Dr. Hughes, I declare—and Mrs. Hughes. Must go and speak to Dr. and Mrs. Hughes for a moment. How do you do? How do you do? Very well, I thank you. . . . Don't I hear another carriage? Who can this be? Very likely the worthy Coles. Upon my word this is charming, to be standing about among such friends! And such a noble fire! I am quite roasted. No coffee, I thank you, for me; never take coffee. A little tea, if you please, sir, by and by—no hurry. O! here it comes. Everything so good!'[1]

There is no mistaking the quality of Miss Bates's heart, whatever her manners may be; and it is a mistake to put her aside as merely a vulgar woman—her vulgarity is superficial, her worth is real.

I have never found Jane Fairfax attractive; but Emma is to be blamed for it—it is her fault if Jane does not charm; Emma stands in the way and obscures her, and prevents her true colours from appearing; one would have liked her better anywhere than at Highbury. As for Frank, Mr. Knightley, though not a benevolent critic, took his measure sufficiently. The incident of the pianoforte is laboured, and is not fully explained and made probable. Such a gift would have roused Highbury to an intolerable curiosity; Miss Bates would have learned the secret and blabbed, good Mr. Weston would have conveyed everybody's surmises from door to door, Mrs. Elton would have been scandalised, and after all, the mysterious gift remained mysterious to all the neighbours, and only inspired Emma with a baseless suspicion for which she ought to be punished, but is not.

[1] III. ii. (xxxviii.).

The party to Box Hill should be studied in every detail, and for consummate workmanship may be compared with the visit to Sotherton in *Mansfield Park*. The relation of every one to every one else is preserved, the 'want of union' in the party, the various currents of likes and dislikes, the effect upon all of the behaviour of Frank Churchill and Emma, leading to the quarrel between Frank and Jane,—all this produces the proper quantity of suspense and curiosity in the reader's mind, which is only cleared away by Frank's letter of explanation near the end of the third volume.

Emma's injurious suspicion of an intrigue between Jane Fairfax and Mr. Dixon, recently married to her friend Miss Campbell, is not only incompatible with her usual behaviour towards Jane, if not as a friend, yet as a person worthy of respect; it is also out of harmony with the moral level of the story, and improbable in itself. A pianoforte might have been sent as a present from the rich young couple, but to imagine that the bridegroom had sent it secretly was too gross a suspicion to have entered the thoughts of a delicately-minded young woman. It is a blot on the story, however ingeniously woven into the construction of the plot. No one comes well out of the business. Emma goes so far as to communicate her suspicions to Frank Churchill himself. He is not shocked, nor is Jane: secure in their mutual confidence they make a jest of it at Emma's expense. It is strange that the whole affair should have provoked so little resentment; for when people have been playing tricks on each other the honours are not usually divided so harmoniously.

The relation between Knightley and Emma is beauti-

fully drawn out, the gradual growth of his affection for her, and with it the growth of his feeling that she might possibly return his affection. When we remember that she was only one-and-twenty, and he thirty-seven, and that he had known her all her life, it is most natural that as she grew into womanhood his friendship should grow into love. It may not be romantic, but it is true and harmonious. On the other side her confidence in him and her consciousness of his superiority to all who come into comparison with him, are brought out by a succession of exquisite touches. One of the prettiest is the scene at the ball at the Crown, when Emma,

'. . . smiling with enjoyment . . . was more disturbed by Mr. Knightley's not dancing than by anything else. There he was, among the standers-by, where he ought not to be; he ought to be dancing—not classing himself with the husbands, and fathers, and whist-players, who were pretending to feel an interest in the dance till their rubbers were made up—so young as he looked! He could not have appeared to greater advantage perhaps anywhere than where he had placed himself. His tall, firm, upright figure, among the bulky forms and stooping shoulders of the elderly men, was such as Emma felt must draw everybody's eyes; and, excepting her own partner [she was dancing with Frank Churchill], there was not one among the whole row of young men to be compared with him. . . . Whenever she caught his eye she forced him to smile; but in general he was looking grave. [being, in fact, jealous of Frank. And when Knightley, observing Mr. Elton's churlish behaviour to Harriet Smith, himself asked her to dance], never had she been more surprised, seldom more delighted, than at that instant. She was all pleasure and gratitude, both for Harriet and herself, and longed to be thanking him; and though too distant for speech, her countenance said much, as soon as she could catch his eye again.' And a little later :—

'Whom are you going to dance with?' asked Mr. Knightley.

She hesitated for a moment, and then replied, 'With you, if you will ask me.'

'Will you?' said he, offering his hand.

'Indeed I will. You have shown that you can dance, and you know we are not really so much brother and sister as to make it at all improper.'

'Brother and sister! No, indeed!'[1]

It lends pleasure to a novel when the author loves the personages of his creation, not as Balzac may have loved Vautrin, and Stevenson John Silver, but as people whom it would be pleasant to live with; as Mrs. Gaskell loved Cynthia, as Charlotte Brontë loved Caroline Helston, and George Eliot Maggie Tulliver. In this way Jane Austen loved Knightley and Emma, and she persuades us that she was right.

Why do we forgive Emma so easily? She behaved unkindly to Harriet Smith in the matter of Robert Martin, and more unkindly still to his relations, who had done her no harm, and were forwarding the match which Emma herself in the end agreed to be the best for Harriet; she was foolish and undignified when she thought Mr. Elton a likely suitor for Harriet; silly in fancying herself to be in love with Frank Churchill; unjust and prejudiced throughout in the matter of Jane Fairfax; indelicate in discussing with a young man like Frank, and in Jane's presence, the scandal of Jane's supposed partiality for Mr. Dixon, a scandal wholly imaginary and invented by herself; unkind again to Harriet when she encouraged her to think herself a fit match for Frank, and too contemptuous when Harriet

[1] III. ii. (xxxviii.).

married at last the man she should have married at first. She insulted the harmless Miss Bates, merely because she was bored by the endless chatter in which her 'desultory-goodwill' was expressed; and showed herself too much the patroness and great lady of Highbury in all her relations with Coles, Coxes, Perrys, and other small gentry of the little town. She was generally wrong in her guesses, and sometimes not too scrupulous in acting upon them. And yet we forgive her and love her. It must be because she was sincere and unaffected, ready to confess herself in the wrong when found out, abounding in good-will where she felt it, always natural and gay, and, above all, warm-hearted and truthful.

With all her faults, we feel sure that her house was well ordered, that she never neglected her father or was impatient with him, in spite of the burden of his weak health, prosy conversation, and dependence upon cards and backgammon; that the mutual respect of her husband and herself never diminished, that her children adored her, that in short she was neither selfish nor self-absorbed, though imperfect she might be.

We might not have approved of all she said and did if we had had the good luck to know her; we might not have loved everything in her; but if we had called at her door and been told that Mrs. Knightley was not at home, we should have gone away disappointed.

CHAPTER VII

'NORTHANGER ABBEY'

Northanger Abbey was written as early as 1798, when Jane Austen was twenty-three, if not earlier; next, therefore, in succession to *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*. It was not published till twenty years later, after her death. The work, under the title of *Susan*, was finished and revised for publication in 1803; the manuscript was sold for ten pounds to Messrs. Crosby & Co., and an early production stipulated for; but no more was heard of it, for the purchaser repented of his bargain, and though he had advertised the book for sale, kept it by him and did not surrender it till 1816. In 1809 the author wrote to Messrs. Crosby, under the pseudonym 'Mrs. Ashton Dennis,' to ask that it should be published, and offered to send a copy of the manuscript, if the original had been lost. The reply was a curt refusal, with a hint of legal proceedings if the work were published by any one else.

In 1816 she thought it worth while to recover the lost manuscript if possible. Her brother Henry undertook the negotiation. 'He found the purchaser very willing to receive back his money; when the bargain was concluded and the money paid, but not till then,

the negotiator had the satisfaction of informing him that the work which he had esteemed so lightly was by the author of *Pride and Prejudice*.'[1]

It is not difficult to understand that the unfavourable reception of her manuscript may have discouraged so sensitive a writer. In the 'Advertisement by the Authoress' which is prefixed to the first volume of the four which contain *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, and must have been written in 1816, she says: 'The public are entreated to bear in mind that thirteen years have passed since it was finished, many more since it was begun, and that during that period places, manners, books, and opinions have undergone considerable changes.' It is clear from this that she was not wholly satisfied with her work: she may have thought it needed further revision; she may have intended to expand it by the addition of a third volume, or have meant it to be published, as in the event it was, together with *Persuasion*. There is no certain answer to such questions: I am inclined to believe that a sense of failing strength made her shrink from the labour of rewriting the last chapters on a larger scale, especially after a period of rapid composition.

Northanger Abbey must have been begun with the object of making fun of the literature of sentimentality and horror, and incidentally satirising the inconsistency between romantic imagination feeding on nothing substantial, and the common realities of life. Then, when the author had got Catherine Morland in hand, and found her more attractive as she grew better acquainted with her, the mock-romantic element was

[1] *Memoir*, p. 129.

dropped, and false sentiment expelled by true. Like *Emma*, *Northanger Abbey* is pure comedy; but comedy exists not only to make us laugh, but to bring out contrasts and harmonies of character, and to give us objects of love and admiration and their opposites.

Perfect or imperfect, *Northanger Abbey* is put by some of her admirers among the best of her work, and not a few, among whom I may reckon myself, think Catherine Morland one of the most delightful of her heroines. Catherine is young but not foolish; her silliness is superficial and the result of inexperience and want of direction; for Mrs. Morland's idea of education was founded upon wholesome neglect.

> She was a very good woman, and wished to see her children everything they ought to be; but her time was so much occupied in lying-in and teaching the little ones, that her elder daughters were inevitably left to shift for themselves.[1]

Jane, herself the seventh of eight children, liked large families, and sometimes puts in more children than there is room for in the book. There are too many Morlands and Thorpes, as there are too many Bennets, Prices, Knightleys, and Watsons; and husbands or wives, and fortunes or good livings, cannot be found for all.

Thus brought up, or allowed to grow up, Catherine's cleverness, right-mindedness, wit, good nature, and good breeding were all her own. She was 'born to be a heroine,' though 'her situation in life, the characters of her father and mother, her own person and disposition were all equally against her'; but after a youth

[1] I. i. (i.).

spent in 'cricket, baseball, riding on horseback, and running about the country,' she became at fifteen sensible of her vocation, and by reading Pope, Gray, Thomson, and Shakespeare, she stored her mind with heroic furniture. And yet she 'reached the age of seventeen without having seen one amiable youth who could call forth her sensibility; without having inspired one real passion, and without having excited even any admiration but what was very moderate and very transient.'[1] But Providence does not forget heroines, and Catherine was invited by Mrs. Allen, a wealthy neighbour, to stay with her and her husband for six weeks at Bath.

Jane Austen employs her best powers in describing Mrs. Allen, or rather in showing that there was nothing in her to describe.

> She had neither beauty, genius, accomplishment, nor manner. The air of a gentlewoman, a great deal of quiet, inactive good temper, and a trifling turn of mind were all that could account for her being the choice of a sensible intelligent man like Mr. Allen.[2]
>
> [Catherine was] from habitude very little incommoded by the remarks and ejaculations of Mrs. Allen, whose vacancy of mind and incapacity for thinking were such that as she never talked a great deal, so she could never be entirely silent; and therefore, while she sat at her work, if she lost her needle or broke her thread, if she heard a carriage in the street, or saw a speck upon her gown, she must observe it aloud, whether there were any one at leisure to answer her or not.[3]

Love of dress and company distinguished her from Lady Bertram in *Mansfield Park*, who, for inertness of mind and vapid serenity, might be compared with her.

[1] I. i. (i.). [2] I. ii. (ii.). [3] I. ix. (ix.).

'How uncomfortable it is,' whispered Catherine, 'not to have a single acquaintance here!'

'Yes, my dear,' replied Mrs. Allen, with perfect serenity, 'it is very uncomfortable indeed. . . .'[1]

And a little later:—

'But, dear Mrs. Allen, are you sure there is nobody you know in all this multitude of people? I think you *must* know somebody.'[2]

'I don't, upon my word—I wish I did. . . .' She repeated [this wish] after every fresh proof, which every morning brought, of her knowing nobody at all.[3]

At length Catherine is introduced by the Master of the Ceremonies to a clever and agreeable young clergyman, Henry Tilney. He is amused and attracted by her freshness and gaiety, which is kindled by his half-patronising, half-deferential manner; and the way she plays the game, without sacrifice of modesty or dignity or humour, is just the kind of thing which may help to fix a young man's fancy. Her delight in her own girlish happiness is charming. She responds to Tilney's irony, is never stupid or sheepish for a moment, and loses her heart with a sweet facility.

We are not admitted very far into the motives of Tilney, who was more of a sportsman and a lover of amusement than a shepherd of sheep. We can only guess at what lay behind his easy-going charm—something deeper than mere good nature and cleverness, we may guess: something beyond the equipment of Crawford, Willoughby, or Wickham; and so it turns out in the course of the story.

After Henry Tilney's introduction to Catherine, and their first dance—

[1] I. ii. (ii.). [2] *Ibid.* [3] I. iii. (iii.).

. . . when they were seated at tea, she found him as agreeable as she had already given him credit for being. . . .

After chatting some time on such matters as naturally arose from the objects around them, he suddenly addressed her with—'I have hitherto been very remiss, Madam, in the proper attentions of a partner here; I have not asked you how long you have been in Bath; whether you were ever here before; whether you have been at the Upper Rooms, the theatre, and the concert; and how you like the place altogether. I have been very negligent;—but are you now at leisure to satisfy me in these particulars? If you are, I will begin directly.'

'You need not give yourself that trouble, Sir.'

'No trouble, I assure you, Madam.' Then, forming his features into a set smile, and affectedly softening his voice, he added, with a simpering air, 'Have you been long in Bath, Madam?'

'About a week, Sir,' replied Catherine, trying not to laugh.

'Really!' with affected astonishment.

'Why should you be surprised, Sir?'

'Why, indeed!' said he, in his natural tone;—'but some emotion must appear to be raised by your reply, and surprise is more easily assumed, and not less reasonable, than any other.—Now let us go on. Were you never here before, Madam?'

'Never, Sir. . . .'

'And are you altogether pleased with Bath?'

'Yes, I like it very well.'

'Now, I must give one smirk, and then we may be rational again.'

Catherine turned away her head, not knowing whether she might venture to laugh.[1]

A little later, after a discussion with good Mrs. Allen upon the prices and uses of different sorts of muslin, the inattention of men to such things, the want of shops in the country, whilst Catherine feared, as she

[1] I. iii. (iii.).

listened to their discourse, that he indulged himself a little too much with the foibles of others—

'What are you thinking of so earnestly?' said he, as they walked back to the ballroom. 'Not of your partner, I hope; for by that shake of the head, your meditations are not satisfactory.'

Catherine coloured, and said, 'I was not thinking of anything.'

'That is artful and deep, to be sure; but I had rather be told at once that you will not tell me.'

'Well, then, I will not.'

'Thank you; for now we shall soon be acquainted, as I am authorised to tease you on this subject whenever we meet, and nothing in the world advances intimacy so much.' [1]

What are we to say to Catherine's breach of the canon (for which Richardson's authority is given),[2] that a young woman must never fall in love with a man till she receives attentions from him? Canon or not, Jane Austen does not observe it, any more than Shakespeare. Catherine's falling in love was as spontaneous as Juliet's and Rosalind's, and we cannot wish it otherwise. It is more modest, because more natural, for a girl to fall in love and confess it to herself, than to play propriety and pretend to be surprised when that happens which might have been expected. The contrary notion is a survival from the harem, and belongs to the period when women were literally given in marriage, and had no choice. So much choice as is conceded in the right to refuse an offer implies a right to more. The man was made for the woman no less than the woman for the man, and any convention which ignores this is barbaric and unnatural. We may see some day unlooked-for

[1] I. iii. (iii.).

[2] *Rambler*, ii. 97 (chap. iii. of *Northanger Abbey*).

extensions of freedom. I would not be so bold as to suggest that in a later generation young men may be wooed by maidens; but development in such a direction is not inconceivable, when we look back a hundred years, and see how vastly the freedom of women has advanced since then, without any diminution of virgin modesty. It may be said that women are clever enough to do without the leap-year method. Nevertheless, many men remain bachelors from mere inadvertence, and many women die unwedded for want of a word spoken. 'She never told her love' is written upon faces where no one reads it. In this instance, though we are not told so, it is natural to suppose that the word was spoken, or the speaking of it made easy, by Tilney's sister Eleanor.

The Tilney family consists of Henry; his father, General Tilney, a combination of ogre and old-fashioned beau; his sister Eleanor, a young woman of the Elinor Dashwood and Georgiana Darcy type—a type much loved by Jane and possibly suggested by the character of her sister Cassandra; and his brother, an uninteresting man of fashion, 'just a tall young man,' as she writes about somebody in one of her letters. The Tilney family make much of Catherine: the young people because they like her, the General because he takes her to be an heiress—her fortune, as we are told, was in fact no more than three thousand pounds;—she goes about with them in Bath, and at length is invited to stay at Northanger Abbey.

Meanwhile Mrs. Allen, daily repeating her *ritournelle*, 'How pleasant it would be if we had any acquaintance here,' found a response at last, for she was addressed

by a lady who turned out to be an old schoolfellow, and was called Mrs. Thorpe.

Their joy at this meeting was very great, as well it might be, since they had been contented to know nothing of each other for the last fifteen years.[1]

Mrs. Thorpe had a son and three daughters, with the eldest of whom, Isabella, Catherine at once fell in love. The two girls were delighted with each other and became inseparable friends.

They called each other by their Christian name, were always arm in arm when they walked, pinned up each other's train for the dance, and were not to be divided in the set.[2]

Catherine's passion for Isabella is entirely genuine and unaffected; Isabella's interest in her was no doubt quickened by the fact that she admired James Morland, Catherine's brother. For the present the friendship was all-satisfying. Isabella Thorpe is one of those females not unfrequently met with in Jane Austen's novels, who combine an empty head and agreeable manners with a clear view of personal advantage. Some of them succeed, some fail in their object, which is to get a husband and a position. They are in the middle distance, between the heroes and the villains, between the Darcys and the Wickhams, the Elizabeths and the Lucy Steeles. Poor Catherine was so delighted with finding a friend to sympathise with her about the *Mysteries of Udolpho* that she did not observe how vapid, vulgar, and self-seeking her new friend was:—

'There is nothing I would not do,' says Isabella Thorpe, 'for those who are really my friends. I have no notion of

[1] I. iv. (iv.). [2] I. v. (v.).

loving people by halves; it is not my nature. . . . O, I must tell you that, just after we parted yesterday, I saw a young man looking at you so earnestly; I am sure he is in love with you.' Catherine coloured, and disclaimed. . . . Isabella laughed. 'It is very true, upon my honour; but I see how it is; you are indifferent to everybody's admiration except that of one gentleman, who shall be nameless. Nay, I cannot blame you' (speaking more seriously). . . . 'I can perfectly comprehend your feelings.'

'But you should not persuade me that I think so very much about Mr. Tilney, for perhaps I may never see him again.'

'Not see him again! My dearest creature, do not talk of it. I am sure you would be miserable if you thought so.'

'No, indeed, I should not. I do not pretend to say that I was not very much pleased with him, but while I have *Udolpho* to read,' says Catherine, 'I feel as if nobody could make me miserable. O, the dreadful black veil! My dear Isabella, I am sure there must be Laurentina's skeleton behind it.'[1]

One specimen of the talk and manners of John Thorpe, Isabella's Tom-and-Jerry brother, is enough. He is driving Catherine in a gig; James Morland and Isabella in another, are just ahead:—

'You don't really think, Mr. Thorpe,' said Catherine . . . 'that James's gig will break down?'

'Break down! O Lord! Did you ever see such a little tittupy thing in your life? There is not a sound piece of iron about it. The wheels have been fairly worn out these ten years at least—and as for the body! upon my soul, you might shake it to pieces yourself with a touch. It is the most devilish little rickety business I ever beheld! —Thank God! we have got a better. I could not be bound to go two miles in it for fifty thousand pounds.'[2]

But a minute more, and he says:—

[1] I. vi. (vi.). (*Laurentini* appears to be the right reading; *Life and Letters*, p. 417.)

[2] I. ix. (ix.).

'A thing of that sort in good hands will last above twenty years after it is fairly worn out. Lord bless you! I would undertake for five pounds to drive it to York and back again without losing a nail.'

Catherine listened with astonishment. . . . Her own family were plain matter-of-fact people, who seldom aimed at wit of any kind; her father at the utmost being contented with a pun, and her mother with a proverb: they were not in the habit, therefore, of telling lies to increase their importance, or of asserting at one moment what they would contradict the next.[1]

Various incidents concur to convince Catherine, though unwilling to be convinced, that the Thorpes are not all she fancied them, while she is drawn to Eleanor Tilney not only by her own merits but by the attractive power which may be exercised by a woman who thinks she has found a wife for her favourite brother. The intimacy is helped on by the embarrassing politeness of General Tilney, who is even more willing than his children to pay her attention.

The General's politeness is of a sort long ago obsolete; it can never have been thought good breeding. His essential vulgarity comes out in the following extract:—

Let me see: Monday will be a busy day with you, we will not come on Monday; and Tuesday will be a busy one with me. I expect my surveyor from Brockham with his report in the morning; and afterwards I cannot in decency fail attending the Club. I really could not face my acquaintance if I stayed away now; for, as I am known to be in the country, it would be taken exceedingly amiss; and it is a rule with me, Miss Morland, never to give offence to any of my neighbours if a small sacrifice of time and attention can prevent it. They are a set of very worthy

[1] I. ix. (ix).

men. They have half a buck from Northanger twice a year; and I dine with them whenever I can. Tuesday, therefore, we may say, is out of the question.[1]

General Tilney cannot invite a young lady to stay at his house without such speeches as this :—

My daughter, Miss Morland, has been forming a very bold wish . . . being disappointed in my hope of seeing the Marquess of Longtown and General Courteney here, some of my very old friends, there is nothing to detain me longer in Bath. . . . Can you, in short, be prevailed upon to quit this scene of public triumph, and oblige your friend Eleanor with your company in Gloucestershire? I am almost ashamed to make the request. . . . If you can be induced to honour us with a visit you will make us happy beyond expression.[2]

All this to a girl of seventeen, the daughter of a country clergyman.

The invitation to visit Northanger Abbey, thirty miles away, in Gloucestershire, was as delightful as it was inspiring.

Her passion for ancient edifices was next in degree to her passion for Henry Tilney;—and castles and abbeys made usually the charm of those reveries which his image did not fill. . . . With all the chances against her of house, hall, place, park, court, and cottage, Northanger turned up an abbey, and she was to be its inhabitant. Its long, damp passages, its narrow cells and ruined chapel were to be within her daily reach, and she could not entirely subdue the hope of some traditional legends, some awful memorials of an injured and ill-fated nun.[3]

When, however, the visit to Northanger Abbey was arranged, Catherine could not leave Bath without some uneasiness.

[1] II. xi. (xxvi.). [2] II. ii. (xvii.). [3] *Ibid.*

It seemed to her that Captain Tilney was falling in love with Isabella [who, in spite of her engagement to James Morland, had been flirting outrageously with the Captain], and Isabella unconsciously encouraging him; unconsciously it must be, for . . . to doubt her truth or good intentions was impossible; and yet . . . she wished Isabella had talked more like her usual self, and not so much about money; and had not looked so well pleased at the sight of Captain Tilney. How strange that she should not perceive his admiration![1]

The reader is now prepared to hear in the course of the story that Isabella throws over James Morland and runs away with Captain Tilney; but they are an uninteresting pair, and their fortunes contribute little to the book except some emotions in Catherine's heart and some light upon her honourable and sensible character. For it is only in appearance that Catherine is a goose. It is true that her right feeling rather ran away from her good sense in the conversation which she held with Henry Tilney on the difficult subject of his brother's flirtation; if she had been three years older she would probably have abstained from any such talk. But Henry understood her, and her simplicity and confidence in himself endeared her to him. After his reassurances, 'she would contend no longer against comfort,'[2] and started with Eleanor and her maid from Milsom Street at ten o'clock in all the pomp of 'the fashionable chaise and four, postillions handsomely liveried, rising so regularly in their stirrups, and numerous outriders properly mounted.'[3]

After a stay of two hours at Petty France, made uncomfortable by General Tilney's 'discontent at whatever

[1] II. iii. (xviii.). [2] II. iv. (xix.). [3] II. v. (xx.).

the inn afforded, and his angry impatience at the waiters,' the General proposed that Catherine should take his place in his son's curricle;

. . . and in the course of a few minutes she found herself with Henry in the curricle, as happy a being as ever existed. . . . Henry drove so well, so quietly. . . . And then his hat sat so well, and the innumerable capes of his greatcoat looked so becomingly important! To be driven by him, next to being dancing with him, was certainly the greatest happiness in the world.[1]

They talk about the Abbey.

'Is it not a fine old place, just what one reads about!' she says.

'And are you prepared to encounter all the horrors that a building such as "what one reads about" may produce? Have you a stout heart? nerves fit for sliding panels and tapestry?'

'O yes! I do not think I should be easily frightened, because there would be so many people in the house; and besides, it has never been uninhabited and deserted for years, and then the family came back to it unawares, without giving any notice, as generally happens. . . .'

'But you must be aware that when a young lady is (by whatever means) introduced into a dwelling of this kind, she is always lodged apart from the rest of the family. . . . She is formally conducted by Dorothy, the ancient housekeeper, up a different staircase, and along many gloomy passages, into an apartment never used since some cousin or kin died in it about twenty years before. . . . Will not your heart sink within you?'[2]

He goes on in the same vein, half frightening, half delighting her, inventing a secret passage, a dagger, a bed of funereal appearance, a wretched Matilda and an extinguished lamp, till he could carry it no further and

[1] II. v. (xx.). [2] *Ibid.*

'was obliged to entreat her to use her own fancy in the perusal of Matilda's woes.'

The comfortable, easy, and modern approach to the mysterious Abbey was disappointing. The elegant furniture, the windows—

. . . to be sure the pointed arch was preserved, the form of them was Gothic, they might be even casements, but every pane was so large, so clear, so light!

Her 'not uncheerful' bedroom contained neither tapestry nor velvet — it was mortifying. But a heroine will not be balked, and she resolved to find something in her bedroom which should answer her expectations. A heavy cedar chest in a deep recess near the fireplace invited investigation. She opened it with difficulty. It contained a white cotton counterpane, properly folded. 'She was gazing on it with the first blush of surprise' when she was interrupted by Miss Tilney, 'anxious for her friend's being ready,' since the General's temper was to be depended upon to spoil an unpunctual meal.[1]

In a house so furnished, and so guarded, she could have nothing to explore or to suffer, and might go to her bedroom as securely as if it had been her own chamber at Fullerton. . . . Her spirits were immediately assisted by the cheerful blaze of a wood fire. 'How much better is this,' said she, as she walked to the fender; 'how much better to find a fire ready lit, than to have to wait shivering in the cold, till all the family are in bed, as so many poor girls have been obliged to do, and then to have a faithful old servant frightening one by coming in with a faggot! How glad I am that Northanger is what it is!'[2]

She sees a high old-fashioned black cabinet; 'not

[1] II. vi. (xxi.). [2] *Ibid.*

absolutely ebony and gold,' but near enough it for purposes of romance. After immense trouble, she gets it open and sees in the centre a small door, also locked, which

> . . . secured in all probability a cavity of importance.
>
> Catherine's heart beat quick, but her courage did not fail her. With a cheek flushed by hope, and an eye straining with curiosity, her fingers grasped the handle of a drawer and drew it forth.

Drawer after drawer was empty. At length she descries a roll of paper. She hastily snuffed her candle—it was burning dim; she snuffed it and extinguished it in one.

> 'A lamp could not have expired with more awful effect. . . Darkness impenetrable and immoveable filled the room. A violent gust of wind, rising with sudden fury, added fresh horror to the moment. . . . Human nature could support no more . . . groping her way to the bed, she jumped hastily in, and sought some suspension of agony by creeping far underneath the clothes. . . . The storm still raged. . . . Hour after hour passed away, and the wearied Catherine had heard three proclaimed by all the clocks in the house before the tempest subsided and she unknowingly fell fast asleep.' She was awaked the next morning at eight o'clock by the housemaid's opening her window shutter. She flew to the mysterious manuscript. 'If the evidence of sight might be trusted, she held a washing bill in her hand. . . . She felt humbled to the dust.'[1]

Eleanor's want of ease in her father's presence, and the absence of any allusion to her mother, combined with Catherine's romantic ideas to beget a strange illusion. She was certain that Mrs. Tilney had been an unhappy wife, and the General an unkind husband. Why had he taken down her portrait, which now hung

[1] II. vi. (xxi.), vii. (xxii.).

in Eleanor's bedroom? Mrs. Tilney's own bedroom she discovered, after a lengthy perambulation of every part of the Abbey, inside and out; but the General would not allow her to enter it. It was no wonder that he should shrink from entering that room.

On asking how long ago Mrs. Tilney had died, Eleanor answered:—

'She has been dead these nine years.' And nine years, Catherine knew, was a trifle of time compared with what generally elapsed after the death of an injured wife, before her room was put to rights.

'You were with her, I suppose, to the last?'

'No,' said Miss Tilney, sighing; 'I was unfortunately from home. Her illness was sudden and short; and before I arrived it was all over.'

Catherine's blood ran cold with the horrid suggestions which naturally sprang from these words. Could it be possible? Could Henry's father——? And yet how many were the examples to justify even the blackest suspicions! —And when she saw him in the evening, while she worked with her friend, slowly pacing the drawing-room for an hour together in silent thoughtfulness, with downcast eyes and contracted brow, she felt secure from all possibility of wronging him. It was the air and attitude of a Montoni! . . . Unhappy man![1]

General Tilney's expressed intention of sitting up to read pamphlets suggested a less lurid though still painful suspicion. . . .

There must be some deeper cause; something was to be done which could be done only while the household slept; and the probability that Mrs. Tilney yet lived, shut up for causes unknown, and receiving from the pitiless hands of her husband a nightly supply of coarse food, was the conclusion which necessarily followed.[2]

These terrible suspicions were only brought to an

[1] II. viii. (xxiii.). [2] *Ibid.*

end by Henry Tilney, who came upon her unexpectedly as she was exploring the guilty chamber, guessed her secret, and made her ashamed of it.

> The visions of romance were over. . . . Most grievously was she humbled. Most bitterly did she cry. It was not only with herself that she was sunk, but with Henry. . . .
>
> Charming as were all Mrs. Radcliffe's works, and charming even as were the works of all her imitators, it was not in them perhaps that human nature, at least in the midland counties of England, was to be looked for. Of the Alps and Pyrenees, with their pine forests and their vices, they might give a faithful delineation. . . . But in the central part of England there was surely some security for the existence even of a wife not beloved, in the laws of the land, and the manners of the age. Murder was not tolerated, servants were not slaves, and neither poison nor sleeping potions to be procured, like rhubarb, from every druggist.
>
> . . . Her resolution formed, of always judging and acting in future with the greatest good sense, she had nothing to do but to forgive herself and be happier than ever; and the lenient hand of time did much for her by insensible gradations in the course of another day.[1]

All Catherine's happiness was upset by a letter from her brother James telling her that Isabella Thorpe had thrown him over, and was engaged to Captain Tilney. Her youth and inexperience, her transparent honesty, her wish for sympathy, and her faith in the friendship of Eleanor Tilney and her brother, led her to disclose to them this terrible secret. What follows is completely in character. She is burning to tell; and it comes out with youthful artlessness:—

> 'I have one favour to beg,' said Catherine, shortly afterwards, in an agitated manner, 'that if your brother should

[1] II. x. (xxv.).

be coming here, you will give me notice of it that I may go away.'

'Our brother!—Frederick!'

'Yes; I am sure I should be very sorry to leave you so soon, but something has happened that would make it very dreadful for me to be in the same house with Captain Tilney.'[1]

The Tilneys hear the news of their brother's engagement with composure; Isabella's want of principle and Frederick's levity were known to them, and they were convinced that their father would not consent to a marriage without money.

'I never was so deceived in any one's character in my life before,' Catherine exclaims.

Henry, cool and ironical as usual, replies:—

'You feel, I suppose, that in losing Isabella you lose half yourself: you feel a void in your heart which nothing else can occupy. Society is becoming irksome; . . . you would not, for instance, now go to a ball for the world. You feel that you have no longer any friend . . . whose counsel, in any difficulty, you could rely on. You feel all this?'

'No,' said Catherine, after a few moments' reflection, 'I do not—ought I? To say the truth, though I am hurt and grieved that I cannot still love her, . . . I do not feel so very, very much afflicted as one would have thought.'

'You feel, as you always do, what is most to the credit of human nature. Such feelings ought to be investigated, that they may know themselves.'[2]

A sentiment worth notice from those readers who attribute cynicism to Jane Austen.

It appeared that Isabella Thorpe, whose parents lived in a rather small way at Putney, had mistaken the extent of Mr. Morland's fortune; so she sent James

[1] II. x. (xxv.). [2] *Ibid.*

Morland about his business without having secured Tilney, and thus lost both her lovers at once. Frederick Tilney had never been serious, knowing the kind of girl he had to deal with. Isabella wrote Catherine a letter full of protestations; but 'such a strain of shallow artifice could not impose even upon Catherine.' Her sincere nature was revolted by it, and to her freely expressed judgment on the conduct of all concerned, Henry could only reply :—

'Your mind is warped by an innate principle of general integrity, and therefore not accessible to the cool reasonings of family partiality, or a desire of revenge.' [1]

The General went away on business for a week. His return, late on the Saturday night, was unexpected, unannounced, violent. Eleanor comes to Catherine's room, but has hardly courage to come in, for she has to break the disastrous news that her father, without any explanation, insists upon Catherine's leaving Northanger immediately :—

'How can I tell you? To-morrow morning is fixed for your leaving us, and not even the hour is left to your choice; the very carriage is ordered, and will be here at seven o'clock, and no servant will be offered you.' [2]

Eleanor's tenderness and good feeling are admirable. One wishes for another volume to do her justice.

Catherine was completely bewildered. Only ten days ago she had been elated and confused by General Tilney's pointed regard, his too significant reference. What had she done, or what had she omitted to do, to merit such a change?

Restored to the caresses of her affectionate family,

[1] II. xii. (xxvii.). [2] II. xiii. (xxviii.).

she might be congratulated, even after a Sunday journey; but behind their expressions of affection there was a bluntness of perception which secured them from resentment or anxiety:—

'Our comfort does not depend upon General Tilney,' says Mrs. Morland.

Catherine sighed.

'Well,' continued her philosophic mother, 'I am glad I did not know of your journey at the time; but now it is all over, perhaps there is no great harm done.'

. . . Her parents, seeing nothing in her ill looks and agitation but the natural consequence of mortified feelings, and of the unusual exertion and fatigue of such a journey, parted from her without any doubt of their being soon slept away. . . . They never once thought of her heart; which for the parents of a young lady of seventeen, just returned from her first excursion from home, was odd enough![1]

The obtuseness of her mother, the good-humoured regrets of Mr. Allen, the silly consolations of Mrs. Allen, were all the distraction poor Catherine could have from absorbing thought:—

Mrs. Morland endeavoured to impress on her daughter's mind the happiness of having such steady well-wishers as Mr. and Mrs. Allen, and the very little consideration which the neglect or unkindness of slight acquaintance like the Tilneys ought to have with her while she could preserve the good opinion and affection of her earliest friends. There was a great deal of good sense in all this; but there are some situations of the human mind in which good sense has very little power; and Catherine's feelings contradicted almost every position her mother advanced.[2]

Three days were spent in restlessness; on the fourth, Henry Tilney appeared at Fullerton, and was received courteously by Mrs. Morland, who thanked him for his

[1] II. xiv. (xxix.). [2] *Ibid.*

attention to her daughter, entreated him not to say another word about the past, and proceeded to make

'. . . common remarks about the weather and roads. Catherine meanwhile—the anxious, agitated, happy, feverish Catherine—said not a word; but her glowing cheek and brightened eye made her mother trust that this good-natured visit would, at least, set her heart at ease for a time. . . . After a couple of minutes' unbroken silence, Henry, turning to Catherine for the first time since her mother's entrance, asked her, with sudden alacrity, if Mr. and Mrs. Allen were now at Fullerton? and on developing, from amidst all her perplexity of words in reply, the meaning which one short syllable would have given, immediately expressed his intention of paying his respects to them; and, with a rising colour, asked her if she would have the goodness to show him the way. . . . They began their walk.' As Mrs. Morland had guessed, he had to give some explanation on his father's account; 'but his first purpose was to explain himself; and before they reached Mr. Allen's grounds he had done it so well that Catherine did not think it could ever be repeated too often. She was assured of his affection; and that heart in return was solicited, which perhaps they pretty equally knew, was already entirely his own; for, though Henry was now sincerely attached to her . . . I must confess that his affection originated in nothing better than gratitude; or in other words, that a persuasion of her partiality for him had been the only cause of giving her a serious thought. It is a new circumstance in romance, I acknowledge, and dreadfully derogatory of an heroine's dignity; but if it be as new in common life, the credit of a wild imagination will at least be all my own.'[1]

The reality of his love for Catherine was revealed to Tilney by the new situation; he had not fallen in love with her at first sight. He must have been charmed by the incautious simplicity and friendly sympathy which allowed Catherine to enter upon difficult subjects of

[1] II. xv. (xxx.).

feeling, because her own native sense, rectitude, and dignity always kept her within the limits of perfect good breeding. He knew he was safe there, and his very first conversation with her at the Lower Rooms must have shown him the quality of her mind. There is no reason to fear, as some critics do, that Catherine, as she grew older, would cease to please, or that the charm of the kitten would be entirely absorbed in the seriousness of the domestic cat.

Henry had behaved as well as possible.

> He had been met near the Abbey by his impatient father, hastily informed in angry tones of Miss Morland's departure, and ordered to think of her no more. Such was the permission upon which he had now offered her his hand.[1]

Indignation and pride had been the generous allies of love. 'The General was furious in his anger, and they parted in dreadful disagreement.'[2]

As he went on to explain his father's conduct and tell her what her own fault was, 'her feelings soon hardened into a triumphant delight. . . . She was guilty only of being less rich than he had supposed her to be.'

It was all John Thorpe's doing. His prating tongue had inflated the consequence of the Morland family to increase his own consequence, since he chose to expect that Catherine would marry him, and since his sister was engaged to Catherine's brother. The foolish General listened and believed as John proceeded with his embroidery, 'doubling what he chose to think the amount of Mr. Morland's preferment, trebling his private fortune, bestowing a rich aunt, and sinking half the children.'[3]

[1] II. xv. (xxx.). [2] *Ibid.* [3] *Ibid.*

Not content with this, he added a sufficient number of thousands to Catherine's three, and made her Mr. Allen's heir. But when Thorpe found out that neither was he likely to marry Catherine, nor Isabella either James Morland or Frederick Tilney, he changed his note, and made them out necessitous, numerous, ambitious, 'a forward, bragging, scheming race. . . .'

The General needed no more. Enraged with almost everybody in the world but himself, he set out the next day for the Abbey, where his performances have been seen.[1]

Since the Morlands were too high-minded and well-bred to allow their daughter to marry except on the proper terms, the General had to be melted in a moment of less acute ill-temper than usual.

The circumstance which chiefly availed was the marriage of his daughter with a man of fortune and consequence, which took place in the course of the summer: an accession of dignity [for the son-in-law was a Viscount] that threw him into a fit of good humour, from which he did not recover till after Eleanor had obtained his forgiveness of Henry, and his permission for him to be a fool if he liked it![2]

It may be fairly objected to *Northanger Abbey* that the perfect naturalness of story and characters is disturbed by the introduction of so impossible a character as General Tilney, and that the noisy, flashy, and insincere John Thorpe and his sister belong to stage comedy rather than fiction; they have the touch of exaggeration which is more effective in drama than in narrative.

[1] II. xv. (xxx.). [2] II. xvi. (xxxi.).

CHAPTER VIII

'PERSUASION'

Persuasion, not published till 1818, after the author's death, was one of the last group, which contains also *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*, written between 1811 and 1816, when she was living at Chawton. It was finished in July 1816, but was added to and worked on during the following year. It is the 'something ready for publication' of which she wrote to Fanny Knight on the 13th March 1817, describing it as 'short—about the length of *Catherine*' (*Northanger Abbey*);[1] and is therefore the latest in date of all her published works.

The story leads off with the well-known sentence describing the delight of Sir Walter Elliot, of Kellynch Hall, in the book of books, the *Baronetage*; in which sentence, restored to its original condition by Macaulay's palmary emendation,[2] may be seen the full-length portrait of the Baronet; and after it we hardly need to be told that 'Vanity was the beginning and end of Sir Walter Elliot's character; vanity of person and of situation.'[3] But by 'vanity' we are to understand, not merely the harmless self-satisfaction which furnishes amuse-

[1] Brabourne, ii. 298.

[2] Vide *Life and Letters*, p. 418.

[3] I. i. (i.).

ment to neighbours; Sir Walter Elliot's vanity was completed and directed by that respect for false ideals which takes the form of patronage or servility; both proceed from the same exaggeration of conventional differences, primarily money; both are equally offensive to a right-judging mind. In short, Sir Walter Elliot was a snob; his daughter Elizabeth a patronising snob; his daughter Mary Musgrove, not being in a position to patronise, an asserting snob. Elizabeth Elliot is little more than an echo of her father, with rather less of personal vanity and a good deal more of ill-nature, and enough of superficial politeness and drawing-room lore to mark the distinction of sex. Anne, the second daughter, is both the central figure of the story and the most charming character to be found in all the stories,—charming, not with the sprightliness of Emma Woodhouse, the genius of Elizabeth Bennet, or the innocent grace of Catherine Morland, but with true individual womanly beauty, and with sensitiveness and penetration all her own. Like Fanny Price, Anne Elliot can endure neglect and embrace humility, but she has more strength of character than Fanny, and her self-sacrifice is all the more gracious. She made one great mistake in her life, in listening to the advice of Lady Russell (who is described as a 'sensible, deserving woman,' but does nothing very sensible or deserving from beginning to end), to refuse her lover, Frederick Wentworth, a captain in the navy, young, handsome, and intelligent. They had met eight years before, when he had happened to spend half a year in the neighbourhood of Kellynch.

He had nothing to do, and she had hardly anybody to love. . . . They were gradually acquainted, and when ac-

quainted, rapidly and deeply in love. . . . A short period of exquisite felicity followed, and but a short one. Troubles soon arose. Sir Walter, on being applied to, without actually withholding his consent, or saying it should never be, gave it all the negative of great astonishment, great coldness, great silence, and a professed resolution of doing nothing for his daughter. He thought it a very degrading alliance ;[1]

and Lady Russell, the evil genius of persuasion, added all her gentle pressure to his weight. At nineteen, 'with all her claims of birth, beauty, and mind,' Anne must not be allowed to throw herself away on a young man who had nothing to look to but his profession and a reasonable prospect of quick promotion in it. His sanguine temper and fearlessness of mind were against him, in Lady Russell's judgment.

She saw in it but an aggravation of the evil. It only added a dangerous character to himself. He was brilliant, he was headstrong. Lady Russell had little taste for wit, and of anything approaching to imprudence a horror.[2]

Gentle, pernicious dulness could not be better described.

Eight years, then, had passed before the story begins, during which Anne had suffered in silent constancy, and Frederick Wentworth in resentment.

No second attachment, the only thoroughly natural, happy, and sufficient cure, at her time of life, had been possible to the nice tone of her mind, the fastidiousness of her taste, in the small limits of the society around them.[3]

She refused an unexceptionable neighbour, Charles Musgrove, who soon consoled himself with her sister Mary, a person as inferior to Anne as Charles himself was to Frederick Wentworth ; she could form no other

[1] I. iv. (iv.). [2] *Ibid.* [3] *Ibid.*

attachment, and bitterly regretted her action. At seven-and-twenty she thought very differently from what she had been made to think at nineteen. 'She did not blame Lady Russell,' but she felt that she herself if applied to in like circumstances for advice would never give counsel 'of such certain immediate wretchedness, such uncertain future good.'

> She had been forced into prudence in her youth, she learned romance as she grew older; the natural sequel of an unnatural beginning.[1]

Since his wife's death, Sir Walter Elliot had paid little regard to expenses and economies, and found it necessary to retrench; and on applying to two confidential friends, Lady Russell and Mr. Shepherd, a lawyer in the neighbouring town, received advice more wholesome than acceptable. He could not submit to

> . . . contractions and restrictions everywhere. To live no longer with the decencies even of a private gentleman! No, he would rather quit Kellynch Hall at once than remain in it on such disgraceful terms.[2]

'Quit Kellynch Hall!' The hint was immediately taken up by Mr. Shepherd and his officious daughter Mrs. Clay. Kellynch was to be let, if a tenant could be found without the slightest appearance of advertisement. A tenant was found—Admiral Croft, whose wife was Frederick Wentworth's sister; and thus it appeared probable that he would be brought into the neighbourhood again. Sir Walter and his elder daughter took a house in Bath. In the meantime Mary Musgrove wanted her sister Anne to keep her company at Upper-

[1] I. iv. (iv.). [2] I. ii. (ii.).

cross Cottage, three miles from Kellynch. It was nearly certain, however undesirable, that the former lovers would meet.

The society of Uppercross consisted of the elder Mr. and Mrs. Musgrove and their grown-up daughters, Louisa and Henrietta, young ladies of twenty and nineteen, at the Great House, and Charles and Mary Musgrove at the Cottage. Anne, who was always useful and was always required to be useful, did not accompany her father and sister to Bath, but stayed on at Uppercross Cottage, frequently coming across Admiral Croft and his agreeable wife, and liking them both, whilst she hardened herself for the inevitable meeting with Captain Wentworth.

Captain Wentworth soon came to make a long stay with his sister at Kellynch, and before long was a frequent visitor at Uppercross. His first meeting with Anne was cold and formal;

> . . . a thousand feelings rushed on Anne, of which this was the most consoling, that it would soon be over. And it was soon over. . . . Her eye half met Captain Wentworth's, a bow, a curtsey passed; she heard his voice;—he talked to Mary . . . the room seemed full—full of persons and voices, but a few minutes ended it. . . . 'It is over! It is over!' she repeated to herself again and again, in nervous gratitude. 'The worst is over!' Mary talked, but she could not attend. She had seen him. They had met. They had been once more in the same room.[1]

A little later Anne

> . . . had this spontaneous information from her sister Mary [who, we must remember, knew nothing of her former engagement]: 'Captain Wentworth is not very gallant by

[1] I. vii. (vii.).

you, Anne, though he was so attentive to me. Henrietta asked him what he thought of you, when they went away, and he said you were so altered he should not have known you again.'[1]

Anne did not know, Wentworth himself probably did not know till much later, what made him hover about Uppercross and its inhabitants, one of whom eight years ago had interested him so profoundly. She interested him still. In his coldness, which was almost unfeeling, in his marked neglect of her, in his efforts to fall in love with some one else, there was resentment, but neither forgetfulness nor indifference.

He had not forgiven Anne Elliot. She had used him ill, deserted and disappointed him; and worse, she had shown a feebleness of character in doing so, which his own decided, confident temper could not endure. She had given him up to oblige others. . . . Her power with him was gone for ever.[2]

But if Frederick Wentworth had known the state of Anne's heart at the moment of meeting her again after so long an absence, he must have flown to her side and forgiven all. As it was, it would have been kinder as well as more courteous, since Anne could not go away, to keep away from Uppercross.

But Uppercross attracted him. He liked Charles Musgrove and his sisters, and though he treated Anne with cold politeness he did not avoid her. 'It was soon Uppercross with him almost every day';[3] and speculation began to arise as to which of the Musgroves, Louisa the livelier, or Henrietta the prettier, he was to carry off.

It would seem to argue a certain amount of insensi-

[1] I. vii. (vii.). [2] *Ibid.* [3] I. ix. (ix.).

bility that a rejected suitor should not have tried to keep out of the way. Mr. Collins was a law to himself; but Henry Crawford at Mansfield, Darcy at Pemberley and Hunsford, and Wentworth at Kellynch, by appearing so often as they did, would in these days have caused much comment among the neighbours, as well as distress to the ladies who had dismissed them. But it must be remembered that a century ago fewer means existed for keeping at a distance from each other people who had reasons for not wishing to meet. The force of inertia was great. Locomotion was difficult and expensive. There actually were highwaymen on the roads. Young women lay becalmed, as it were, in the houses of friends till some uncle's or brother's post-chaise came by to carry them away. Anne Elliot could not get away to Bath from Uppercross till Lady Russell provided facilities for her removal; Fanny Price stayed on at Portsmouth for weeks and weeks to suit Sir Thomas Bertram's convenience; Jane herself wished to travel by coach, but 'Frank would not let her.' Travelling arrangements were made on the scale of months, not of weeks or days; and when a gentleman had spent fifty pounds in getting from one side of the kingdom to the other, he could not be off again at any moment.

Even so, Captain Wentworth's behaviour is not fully accounted for; granted that Anne's refusal eight years before was no sufficient reason for his keeping aloof, and that the attraction of neighbourhood proved too strong for him to resist, this does not excuse his paying attention to Louisa Musgrove in Anne's presence or within her hearing.

As Darcy, proud and resentful, could not keep away

from Elizabeth Bennet, so Wentworth, nursing pride and resentment whilst he was paying court to Louisa Musgrove, and possibly winning her affections, is all the while swimming against the stream of a stronger attraction, the force of which he feels whilst he refuses to acknowledge it. Anne is his fate, though he will not admit it. The fluctuations of his feeling are delicately hinted rather than described. To the reader who does not know the event, Wentworth's action is as puzzling as it was to Anne Elliot. He was hard put to it to explain it or to justify himself, when reviewing the past eight years in happy talk with Anne, after all was cleared up; resentment and pride are too prominent; but we are probably meant to understand that Anne's constancy under discouragement and temptation required, to meet it and complete it, a force of character in her lover, the unfavourable side of which was a capacity of pride and resentment, the complement of a strenuous and commanding temper. He is pulled many ways; and the best side of his character is only fully shown when at the last moment he writes and puts into Anne's hand the letter which decides her fate. Till then we see his merits through the partial eyes of Anne, and through a general approval accorded to his charm of manner and conversation. It is only towards the end that his true character appears. We take his naval exploits for granted, much as we do in real life; and after all, except in the scenes of the Bath period, he is rather the man whom Anne Elliot loved, than a very remarkable human figure.

The view of the situation naturally taken by neighbours is excellently given in a conversation between

cheery Admiral Croft and his wife, as they drive in their gig, not without hazard, in the narrow Uppercross lanes, having taken up Anne on the way :—

'He certainly means to have one or other of those two girls, Sophy,' said the Admiral; 'but there is no saying which. He has been running after them, too, long enough, one would think, to make up his mind. Ay, this comes of the peace. If it were war, now, he would have settled it long ago.—We sailors, Miss Elliot, cannot afford to make long courtships in time of war. . . . I do not like having such things so long in hand. I wish Frederick would spread a little more canvas, and bring us home one of these young ladies to Kellynch. Then there would always be company for them. And very nice young ladies they both are; I hardly know one from the other.'

'Very good-humoured, unaffected girls, indeed,' said Mrs. Croft, in a tone of calmer praise . . . 'and a very respectable family. One could not be connected with better people. My dear Admiral, that post! We shall certainly take that post.'

But by coolly giving the reins a better direction herself, they happily passed the danger; . . . and Anne, with some amusement at their style of driving, which she imagined no bad representation of the general guidance of their affairs, found herself safely deposited by them at the Cottage.[1]

Here occurs the only incident in the novel—one may almost say the only incident in all the novels, since elopements, which are frequent, are not so much incidents as pieces of stage-business—Louisa Musgrove's accident on the Cobb at Lyme.

It was agreed that though the season was mid-November, an excursion to Lyme Regis should be made, to visit a friend of Wentworth, Captain Harville, who with his wife was staying there for the winter.

[1] I. x. (x.).

The distance from Uppercross to Lyme was no more than seventeen miles; but as the days were short, rooms were engaged at Lyme, and they were to stay the night there. The party consisted of Charles and Mary Musgrove, Henrietta, Louisa, Anne, and Captain Wentworth; for Anne was growing used to being in Captain Wentworth's company. And if this were so, why should she avoid him?

It is not often that Jane Austen writes descriptions of natural scenery. She would not imitate the faults of Mrs. Radcliffe's manner by introducing a landscape whenever the scene is changed or a new emotion excited; but as she has been charged with insensibility to natural beauty, in spite of her saying that she thought it would be one of the joys of heaven, it is worth while to recall here a passage which, though it was written a hundred years ago, and has been copied into every Dorsetshire guide-book, has not lost beauty and freshness:—

> They were come too late in the year for any amusement or variety which Lyme, as a public place, might offer; the rooms were shut up, the lodgers almost all gone, scarcely any family but of the residents left; and (as there is nothing to admire in the buildings themselves) the remarkable situation of the town, the principal street almost hurrying into the water, the walk to the Cobb, skirting round the pleasant little bay, which in the season is animated with bathing machines and company;—the Cobb itself, its old wonders and new improvements, with the very beautiful line of cliffs stretching out to the east of the town, are what the stranger's eye will seek; and a very strange stranger it must be who does not see charms in the immediate environs of Lyme, to make him wish to know it better.[1]

She goes on to speak in her old-fashioned language of

[1] I. xi. (xi.).

Charmouth, Up Lyme, and Pinny; places to be 'visited, and visited again, to make the worth of Lyme understood.'

The Harvilles, with their friend Captain Benwick, were settled 'in a small house near the foot of an old pier of unknown date'; a house identified by visitors furnished with guide-books and note-books, perhaps truly. Captain Wentworth was delighted with the hearty welcome of his old comrades. The good fellowship of the navy, compared with the formality and display of landsmen, attracted but depressed Anne, for (she thought) 'these would have been all my friends.'

The next morning was spent in dawdling about after the manner of people who visit a place that has no special interest for them. They noticed and were noticed by a young, agreeable-looking, and well-to-do stranger, whose curricle and its appointments were of the latest fashion, and who was 'undoubtedly a gentleman.' On inquiring they learnt that this was a Mr. Elliot, in fact the Mr. Elliot who was the heir presumptive to the baronetcy and the Kellynch estate. Mary Musgrove, whose thoughts ran upon baronets and baronetcies, was greatly excited by seeing him, though it was only a passing glance. 'Do you think he had the Elliot countenance?' she asked. She wondered that she had not observed the Elliot arms on the carriage.[1]

As the days were short they must return early. The party went down for a last look at the Cobb; and here Louisa Musgrove, who now had possession of Captain Wentworth, was seized by a desire to be jumped by him down the steep flight of steps from the higher to the lower platform. He advised her against a second

[1] I. xii. (xii.).

trial, 'thought the jar too great.' But she persisted, missed his hand, fell on the pavement on the Lower Cobb, and struck her head so violently that she was taken up for dead.[1]

What happened is described in the fullest detail: the despair and bewilderment of all except Anne; the hysterics and fainting of Mary and Henrietta; the paralysed inactivity of Charles Musgrove, and of the three sailors, who amongst them might have shown some presence of mind, show that the terrible and the ludicrous may exist side by side.

Louisa was taken to Captain Harville's house to be nursed by his wife. The case was dangerous but not hopeless. The question was, Who was to stay at Lyme, who to return to Uppercross? Anne showed promptitude and good sense, which was fully appreciated by Captain Wentworth. After much indecision she returns to Uppercross, Wentworth stays with the watchers at Lyme. For the present they part; he pledged in honour, as he thought, to Louisa Musgrove, though no actual word of love had passed between them; she with all her former feeling revived, and then mortified again by his deliberate and cruel coldness.

Her next remove is with Lady Russell to join her own family at Bath.

If Louisa recovered [she said to herself as she sat at the Cottage, waiting for Lady Russell's carriage] there could not be a doubt of what would follow. A few months hence, and the room now so deserted, occupied but by her silent pensive self, might be filled again with all that was happy and gay, all that was glowing and bright in prosperous love, all that was most unlike Anne Elliot![2]

[1] I. xii. (xii.). [2] II. i. (xiii.).

Captain Wentworth had attached himself to Louisa from sentiments of pride and anger; Anne never had a rival nor an equal, and he had learnt to prize her true worth again at Uppercross and at Lyme. But Louisa might have fixed her affection on him, and if so, he was not free.

Arrived at Bath, Anne found her father and sister much occupied with a newcomer, the same Mr. Elliot whom Anne had seen at Lyme. Some years before he had married, and had been cut by Sir Walter for marrying, 'a rich woman of inferior birth.'[1] Mrs. Elliot was dead since then: and now her husband was pardoned and in high favour at Camden Place. He was a good-looking man (a great point with Sir Walter) though 'very much underhung, a defect which time seemed to have increased.'[2]

Readers of Jane Austen's works become aware of her belief that marriages, though they may seem to be made in heaven, may be remade upon earth. And, indeed, if Frederick Wentworth had married Louisa Musgrove, and Mr. Elliot had continued to be as agreeable, attentive, sensible, and right-minded as he at first appeared to be, who can answer for Anne? As she listened to Lady Russell,

> . . . For a few moments her imagination and her heart were bewitched. The idea of becoming what her mother had been; of having the precious name of 'Lady Elliot' first revived in herself; of being restored to Kellynch, calling it her home again, her home for ever, was a charm which she could not immediately resist.[3]

If she could have cleared her mind of certain misgivings about Mr. Elliot's character, a possible laxity of moral

[1] I. i. (i.). [2] II. iii. (xv.). [3] II. v. (xvii.).

principle, a probable want of religious seriousness, she might have been happy as Lady Elliot of Kellynch, and the knowledge of Frederick Wentworth married to Louisa Musgrove might have helped her to accept a marriage with Mr. Elliot.

But Frederick Wentworth did not marry Louisa Musgrove. That Frederick's mind was full of resentment and wounded pride was no reason why he should love Louisa Musgrove; that Louisa prided herself on her strength of purpose was no reason why she should not change her mind; it is out of incongruities such as these that the web of life is fashioned. The last person who could have been suspected of making love to Louisa, except that he was the most susceptible of human beings, was Captain Benwick, the friend of the Harvilles, the bereaved lover of six months ago, who had come to Lyme to be comforted by his friends, and had, in the interval, nearly made a declaration of love to Anne herself, finding in her a congenial feeling for literature and poetry. But so it was.

Captain Benwick and Louisa Musgrove! The high-spirited, joyous-talking Louisa Musgrove, and the dejected, thinking, feeling, reading Captain Benwick, seemed each of them everything that would not suit the other. Their minds most dissimilar! Where could have been the attraction? The answer soon presented itself. It had been in situation. They had been thrown together several weeks; they had been living in the same small family party; . . . Louisa just recovering from illness had been in an interesting state, and Captain Benwick was not inconsolable. . . . He had an affectionate heart. He must love somebody. She saw no reason against their being happy. Louisa had fine naval fervour to begin with, and they would soon grow more alike. . . . There was nothing in the engagement to excite lasting

wonder; and if Captain Wentworth lost no friend by it, certainly nothing to be regretted. No, it was not regret which made Anne's heart beat in spite of herself, and brought the colour into her cheeks, when she thought of Captain Wentworth unshackled and free. She had some feelings which she was ashamed to investigate. They were too much like joy, senseless joy![1]

Was there not something to excite wonder in Captain Wentworth's having once condescended from Anne Elliot to Louisa Musgrove? That had been Lady Russell's opinion, and we may be sure that she had thought Anne well escaped when Wentworth and Louisa appeared to be engaged to one another. But Jane Austen's heroines forgive much in their lovers; Elizabeth, Fanny, Elinor, and now Anne.

Here the story might have begun to draw to a close. But as it is written, the reader has yet to guess at Frederick Wentworth's feelings; and the suspense is heightened and prolonged by the intrusion of Mr. Elliot, who takes a strong fancy to Anne, and pays her much attention. Being her cousin, and in favour with her father, he had access to her at all times, and she had as yet shown no distaste for his company. She now met him every day. But Captain Wentworth came to Bath, and Mr. Elliot's confidential cousinly manner became intolerable.

The first meeting of Wentworth and Anne in Bath showed her that a change had taken place in him.

For the first time since their renewed acquaintance she felt that she was betraying the least sensibility of the two. She had the advantage of him in the preparation of the last few moments. All the overpowering, blinding, bewilder-

[1] II. vi. (xviii.).

ing first effects of strong surprise were over with her. Still, however, she had enough to feel! It was agitation, pain, pleasure; a something between delight and misery. . . .

They had, by dint of being so very much together, got to speak to each other with a considerable portion of apparent indifference or calmness; but he could not do it now. Time had changed him, or Louisa had changed him. There was consciousness of some sort or other. . . . It was Captain Wentworth not comfortable, not easy, not able to feign that he was.[1]

There was to be a concert at the Rooms, patronised by their cousins, Lady Dalrymple and Miss Carteret. Of course they must be there, for Sir Walter was always in attendance on her ladyship; and Captain Wentworth, too,

. . . was very fond of music. If she could only have a few minutes' conversation with him again she fancied she should be satisfied; and as to the power of addressing him, she felt all over courage if the opportunity occurred. Elizabeth had turned from him, Lady Russell overlooked him; her nerves were strengthened by these circumstances; she felt that she owed him attention.[2]

Bravo, Anne! The neglected and solitary woman learns in perfect modesty to act for herself. Now was the moment for her to woo her lover, if she would win him back. It was her place to heal the wound inflicted by her eight years ago.

One of the most finished pieces of writing in the whole work, both in general conception and in detail, is the account of this concert. The whole *dramatis personae* are there: Sir Walter Elliot and his daughters; the intriguing parasite Mrs. Clay; Lady Russell; the Dalrymple-Carteret party, with their hangers-on; Mr. Elliot,

[1] II. vii. (xix.). [2] *Ibid.*

Captain Wentworth. We see and feel them all in the Octagon Room and the Concert Room as if we were there; the *nuances* and angles of the relation of each to each and all are displayed by clearness of vision, material and mental, and sharp definition in description.

The Elliots and Mrs. Clay were first in the Rooms; that incomparable toady Sir Walter making it a point to be attentive and ridiculous whenever 'our cousins, Lady Dalrymple and Miss Carteret,' made their appearance. They had hardly taken their station by one of the fires in the Octagon Room, when

> . . . Captain Wentworth walked in alone. Anne was the nearest to him, and making yet a little advance, she instantly spoke. He was preparing only to bow and pass on, but her gentle 'How do you do?' brought him out of the straight line to stand near her, and make inquiries in return, in spite of the formidable father and sister in the background.[1]

Anne's behaviour was instinctive and from the heart; but if it had been coldly planned it could not have been more successful. They talk about Louisa Musgrove, her recovery, her character, her engagement to the facile Captain Benwick, and come upon dangerous ground in speaking of constancy. Benwick's promised wife, Fanny Harville, he says,

> . . . was a very superior creature, and his attachment to her was indeed attachment. A man does not recover from such a devotion of the heart to such a woman. He ought not; he does not.[2]

A little more, and the conversation was broken off by the entrance of the Dalrymple-Carteret party, into which Anne was absorbed, and divided from Captain Wentworth.

[1] II. viii. (xx.). [2] *Ibid.*

Anne saw nothing, thought nothing, of the brilliancy of the room. Her happiness was from within. Her eyes were bright, and her cheeks glowed ;—but she knew nothing about it. She was thinking only of the last half-hour, and as they passed to their seats her mind took a hasty range over it. His choice of subjects, his expressions, and still more his manner and look . . . his half-averted eyes and more than half-expressive glance all declared that he had a heart returning to her at least; that anger, resentment, avoidance were no more; and that they were succeeded, not merely by friendship and regard, but by the tenderness of the past. Yes, some share of the tenderness of the past! She could not contemplate the change as implying less. He must love her.[1]

But a shadow comes over this happy prospect. 'Mr. Elliot had manœuvred so well as to have a seat by her,'[2] and he plied her with compliments and attentions which came very near to an offer of marriage. Captain Wentworth approached, but retired on seeing Mr. Elliot; came back when he went away, again retired, addressing her

. . . in a reserved yet hurried sort of farewell—'He must wish her good-night; he was going; he should get home as fast as he could. . . .' Jealousy of Mr. Elliot! It was the only intelligible motive. Captain Wentworth jealous of her affection! Could she have believed it a week ago—three hours ago! For a moment the gratification was exquisite.[2]

The next morning Anne went to visit an old schoolfriend, Mrs. Smith, a widow, poor and an invalid.

Prettier musings of high-wrought love and eternal constancy could never have passed along the streets of Bath than Anne was sporting with from Camden Place to Westgate Buildings. It was almost enough to spread purification and perfume all the way.[3]

[1] II. viii. (xx.) [2] *Ibid.* [3] II. ix. (xxi.).

From Mrs. Smith, whose personal experience had made her well acquainted with Mr. Elliot, she received so bad an account of his character for unkindness, ingratitude, and inhumanity, that she shuddered to think that there had been a time when it was just possible that she might have been persuaded by Lady Russell to marry him.

It is only a devoted admirer or a patient reader who will be interested in the minute details of everybody's movements in Bath: Musgroves (for that whole family also appeared), Elliots, Crofts, Harvilles, Lady Russell, besides the two whose happiness chiefly concerns us; the change of scene from street to street, from Camden Place to the White Hart Inn. But every detail is perfectly understood and worked into its place with unerring skill and accuracy. Into the turmoil of the hotel where the Musgroves are staying Captain Wentworth enters, and sits down to write a letter which concerns Captain Harville. He is sitting with his back to the rest of the party, whilst Mrs. Musgrove talks of family matters to Mrs. Croft. Captain Harville and Anne also began a conversation near the table at which he was writing; and their voices caught his ear and arrested his attention. Then it was that Anne, in discussing Captain Benwick's engagement to Louisa Musgrove, fell upon the topic of female constancy:—

'Your feelings may be the strongest,' said Anne, 'but . . . ours are the most tender. . . . Nay, it would be too hard upon you, if it were otherwise. You have difficulties and privations and dangers enough to struggle with. . . . It would be too hard indeed (with a faltering voice) if woman's feelings were to be added to all this!'[1]

[1] II. xi. (xxiii.).

'We shall never agree, I suppose, upon this question,' said Captain Harville; and the conversation continues, increasing in interest till its climax in the following eloquent paragraph:—

'O!' cried Anne eagerly, 'I hope I do justice to all that is felt by you, and by those who resemble you. . . . I should deserve utter contempt if I dared to suppose that true attachment and constancy were known only by woman. No, I believe you . . . equal to every important exertion, and to every domestic forbearance, so long as—if I may be allowed the expression—so long as you have an object. I mean, while the woman you love lives, and lives for you. All the privilege I claim for my own sex (it is not a very enviable one, you need not covet it) is that of loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone!'

She could not immediately have uttered another sentence; her heart was too full, her breath too much oppressed.[1]

Captain Wentworth, who had already shown some signs of interest in their conversation, now sealed the letter he had been writing, and passed out of the room without a look; but in a moment returned, on the pretext of having left his gloves, took up his letter and placed it before Anne, 'with eyes of glowing entreaty fixed on her for a moment,' and was gone again.

'The revolution which one instant had made in Anne was almost beyond expression.' The letter contained all that her most ardent wishes could desire. Her lover's doubts had been scattered in a moment by this accidental revelation of what was her ideal of female constancy.

Her eyes devoured the following words:

'I can listen no longer in silence . . . 'You pierce my soul. I am half agony, half hope. . . . Unjust I may have

[1] II. xi. (xxiii.).

been, weak and resentful I have been, but never inconstant. You alone have brought me to Bath. For you alone I think and plan.—Have you not seen this? Can you fail to have understood my wishes? . . . I can hardly write. I am every instant hearing something which overpowers me.'[1]

A little later—and meantime the interruptions of everyday life among people unoccupied or occupied with trifles, idle and vagabond, interruptions designed by the spirit of inopportune mischief to spoil reality, are described with remorseless minuteness — Anne, walking with Charles Musgrove in Union Street, meets Captain Wentworth, who is asked by Charles, busy about a gun somewhere else, to give her his arm as far as Camden Place. Then all is cleared up.

There they exchanged again those feelings and those promises which had once before seemed to secure everything, but which had been followed by so many, many years of division and estrangement. There they returned again into the past, more exquisitely happy perhaps in their reunion, than when it had been first projected; more tender, more tried, more fixed in a knowledge of each other's character, truth, and attachment; more equal to act, more justified in acting. And there, as they slowly paced the gradual ascent, heedless of every group around them, . . . all the little variations of the last week were gone through; and of yesterday and to-day there could scarcely be an end.[2]

Here ends this charming narrative; for no one is deeply concerned to know that Elizabeth Elliot did not marry; that Mr. Elliot disappeared from Bath society in company with Mrs. Clay, into obscurity and disrepute; that Lady Russell 'admitted that she had been pretty completely wrong'; and that Frederick Wentworth 'hoped he might soon be in charity with her.'[3]

[1] II. xi. (xxiii.).
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] II. xii. (xxiv.). The *dénouement* of the story had been differ-

Anne Elliot, though 'almost too good for me,' as the author wrote, was not too good for her to admire and love. Anne is too yielding, too unselfish, too willing a helper to be a heroine of the heroic kind; but she has strength as well as sweetness, clearness of vision, knowledge of character, rectitude and honesty, and presence of mind, as well as the personal dignity which is often confounded with pride. It is a little surprising to find Anne saying, *à propos* of the deference paid by the Elliots to Lady Dalrymple and her daughter, 'I suppose I have more pride than any of you';[1] but it is in character, if by pride is meant the instinct which forbids any decline from self-respect: and this is explained by the remark which follows, that 'Anne could not believe in their having the same sort of pride.' She has also enough of tolerant humour to see the absurdity of what goes on around her, and to extricate herself from being involved in it. She is never insipid or inert. She sees everything and understands everybody. She is not blind to the parade of the Elliots, the slatternly facility of Musgrove good-nature, the untrustworthy character of Mr. Elliot and Mrs. Clay. Only one person escapes her critical eye, Lady Russell; a true touch, for we are all unwilling to distrust an infallible monitor; and at last she frees herself from Lady Russell too. It was to the credit of her heart, her understanding, her good breeding, and her sense of what was fitting, that she came forward at the end,

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ently written; but the author was dissatisfied with it, and after some disappointment and depression rewrote, or rather wrote anew, the incomparable tenth and eleventh chapters. The cancelled chapter is given in the *Memoir*, pp. 167-180 (2nd Ed.), and is well worth reading.

[1] II. iv. (xvi.).

seeing Wentworth hesitating between love and jealousy, and showed him the countenance of a friend; the only objection to her perspicacity is that she did not understand his behaviour when love was getting the better of jealousy and pride, but allowed Mr. Elliot's shadow to come between them; and this is to the credit of her modesty. Above all, she is a constant and a wise lover. There is no sacrifice of sense to sentiment; the friendship of the pair does not depend upon youth and fancy, though enlivened by youth and fancy—it is founded on character and mutual respect.

The same delicate characterisation is to be found here with which we are familiar in the other novels, as much in the minor characters as in the principals. Every figure is distinct and self-consistent: Charles Musgrove, the heir to a good estate and no duties, with his easy-going good-nature, obliging and good tempered, but with a vein of selfishness and obstinacy when he chose to have his own way; Mary his wife, who had never considered how other people regarded her, indulged herself in perpetual weak health, never denied herself a fancy, always behaved as if her rank as a baronet's daughter dispensed her from the duties of a gentlewoman; took precedence of her mother-in-law, Mrs. Musgrove, on every occasion, made much of the difference between great houses and small houses, elder sons and younger sons, rectors and curates; herself and her lesser importance were the centre of everything to her, as himself and his greater importance to her father, the Baronet. She pestered her good-natured husband with nerves and imaginary illness, neglected her children, did nothing for herself that some one else could be got to

do for her. And yet she is not so odious as her elder sister Elizabeth; she is completely natural, and so artless that she amuses where a more scheming selfishness would disgust. Lady Russell, the mirror of conventionality, deluding herself and all her neighbours into the belief of her good sense, and missing the objects which make good sense valuable, is ranked on the side of the good, with the Crofts, Mrs. Musgrove, the Harvilles; but she is the chief mischief-maker from the beginning, and is more kindly treated than she deserves, as such people are.

The villain of the piece, Mr. Elliot, like Willoughby in *Sense and Sensibility* and Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice*, appears to have no good qualities, and therefore is less life-like and less interesting than the Crawfords in *Mansfield Park* and the Thorpes in *Northanger Abbey*. Mrs. Clay is another unmixed character, and as unconvincing as Lady Susan in the early work bearing that title. These evil geniuses of both sexes are stage villains, and require the stage to set them off. Again and again one is inclined to cry, 'O that Jane Austen had written comedies as well as novels!' Her dramatic power is exquisite; and if her plots are uneventful, her dialogue is perfect comedy, or would be perfect comedy if the thought of the stage had added its excitement to the composition. She should have given us more of her work; and if some of it had been in a dramatic form, the world would have been the richer. But this might be said of Scott, of Dickens, of Thackeray, and the unexplored region is sometimes well left alone.

Jane Austen is as lavish as Nature herself in creating new persons. Mrs. Smith is one of these. Though an

unimportant personage, only introduced to remove a misunderstanding, she is as complete as any character in the book. Her temperament is sanguine, not chilled by ill-health and misfortune. Her knowledge of Mr. Elliot and her animosity against him combine to make her intervene exactly in the right way. I know no better instance of the author's creative skill, and of the truth that all her characters are individuals, not types; no less in these sketches of half-seen people than in the full-length portraits.

CHAPTER IX

'LADY SUSAN'

Lady Susan, probably written between 1792 and 1796, is a study of a bad woman, whose sole merit, if it be a merit, is that she does not palliate her conduct or blind herself by specious excuses. She is no hypocrite, if that is compatible with a course of action chiefly kept together by lies; she pretends no good motives, no good feelings; disguises neither resentments, dislikes, nor ambitions; behaves upon paper, in short, as she would not (it may be supposed) behave in company. The epistolary form of the book is unfavourable to narrative, and excludes drama, that is, conversation, except at the expense of probability; for in real life no narrative was ever conveyed and continued by correspondence. This artifice being accepted and having passed into a convention, a conventional probability is accepted with it; dialogue is imported into the letters (as largely by Richardson) and the vehicle of correspondence is assumed as the means adopted by the writer for telling the story and displaying the characters, which is what interests the reader. In *Lady Susan*, however, there is no dialogue, and not much narrative: the author seems to have dispensed with all the help she could possibly spare.

Lady Susan is a novel of influence—the influence upon all around her of one attractive, clever, and unscrupulous woman. There is nothing improbable in this; but it is improbable that such a woman should reveal to another woman all the deformity of her character. So practised a liar as Lady Susan would have lied to Mrs. Johnson as she lied to every one else; she would have lied to herself to put a good face on her scheming. For Tartuffe had a conscience, and Nero thought himself a fine fellow.

Lady Susan Vernon is about thirty-five years old, beautiful, clever, and of fascinating manners. She has been a widow for about four months. We are given to understand that she had ruined her husband by her extravagance, and was sufficiently in difficulties to make it desirable for her to spend some time with her brother-in-law and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Vernon, at Churchhill, their country house. But the moment of her visit was decided by her having outstayed her welcome in her 'retirement,' as she calls it, with her late husband's friends, Mr. and Mrs. Mainwaring. She had set herself to destroy their domestic happiness, by making love to the husband, and poisoning the wife's mind with jealousy, while at the same time by her attentions to Sir James Martin, a young man attached to Mrs. Mainwaring's sister, she 'deprived an amiable girl of her lover,' apparently from mere love of mischief, but as it appeared afterwards, not without a second motive.

Reginald de Courcy, Mrs. Charles Vernon's younger brother, who came at the same time to stay with his sister at Churchhill, was prejudiced against Lady Susan.

'What a woman she must be!' he writes to his sister, Mrs. Charles Vernon. 'I long to see her . . . that I may form some idea of those bewitching powers which can do so much—engaging at the same time, and in the same house, the affections of two men, who were neither of them at liberty to bestow them—and all this without the charm of youth!'[1]

Lady Susan, having settled that Sir James Martin is not good enough for herself, decides that he shall marry her daughter Frederica, a schoolgirl of sixteen, whom she has neglected, and dislikes. As regarded her own plans, Lady Susan thought that Reginald de Courcy, the heir to an entailed property, would do well enough as a second husband for herself, though twelve years her junior; and, using all her power of fascination, she turns the young man's head so as to make him disbelieve all that has been said against her, and become her lover against the wish of all his best friends. The sacrifice of Frederica to Sir James Martin, Lady Susan's dropped, if not cast-off lover, goes on in spite of the girl's personal dislike of him. As for Sir James himself, Mrs. Johnson writes to Lady Susan:—

I talked to him about you and your daughter, and he is so far from having forgotten you, that I am sure he would marry either of you with pleasure. . . . He is as silly as ever.[2]

Of Reginald, Lady Susan says that she does not at present intend anything so serious as marriage, but means to triumph over his prejudice, and use him as she may see occasion.

'I have subdued him entirely by sentiment and serious

[1] Letter iv. p. 209. [2] Letter ix. p. 220.

conversation, and made him, I may venture to say, at least *half* in love with me, without the semblance of the most commonplace flirtation.'[1]

At the same time her affection, if such a term can be used, is given to Mrs. Mainwaring's husband. She has thus three lovers in hand at once.

Poor Frederica, driven wild by her mother's determination to make her marry Sir James Martin, tries to run away from school, is detected and brought back (an incident, by the way, introduced in *Pride and Prejudice*); and as the schoolmistress, whether from propriety or, as Lady Susan suspects, 'the fear of never getting her money,' refuses to take her back, she is kept at Churchhill as a prisoner under her mother's eye. Though sixteen years old, she is treated as if she were a child, while at the same time she is being bidden to prepare for marriage. In her despair she does the most ill-judged, hazardous, ridiculous thing possible; she throws herself upon Reginald de Courcy's pity—he being the only person who had any power with her mother—to save her from Sir James Martin. By this original device the hero and heroine are brought together. Though she did not disconcert Lady Susan's machinations by this unexpected move, Frederica roused in Reginald an interest in herself, and cooled her mother's fancy for him; and as at this moment Mr. Mainwaring paid an unexpected visit to London in his wife's absence, Lady Susan was in a position to feel 'the contrast between his person and manners and those of Reginald, to the infinite disadvantage of

[1] Letter x. p. 222.

the latter.'[1] For an hour or two she was even staggered in her resolution of marrying him.

'I have not given Mainwaring any hint of my intention, or allowed him to consider my acquaintance with Reginald as more than the commonest flirtation, and he is tolerably appeased.'[2]

The harmony between Lady Susan and her friend Mrs. Johnson is complete, but was not likely to be lasting; and one of the pleasures of reading the book to the end, had it been finished, would doubtless have been to see at what point and on what ground these dearest friends became deadliest enemies. 'Facts are such horrid things,' says Mrs. Johnson; and we may trust our authoress to have found horrid facts enough to break so ill-omened a friendship as that between Lady Susan and her dearest Alicia.

Reginald and Lady Susan quarrel. Frederica becomes a permanent guest with the Charles Vernons at Churchhill, her mother gladly handing her over, and after a few months forgetting her altogether. Indeed, she had other things to think of; for as soon as she was rid of her daughter, she married Sir James Martin.

Sir James may seem to have drawn a harder lot than was fully merited; I leave him therefore to all the pity that anybody can give him.[3]

The story breaks off just when we begin to see how it will end. If it had been rewritten in a narrative form, like *First Impressions* and *Elinor and Marianne*, Lady Susan and Mrs. Johnson would have met with their deserts, the family history of the Mainwarings

[1] Letter xxix. p. 273. [2] *Ibid.* [3] Conclusion, p. 291.

would have been developed in detail, and the characters of the hero and heroine, Reginald and Frederica, which are merely sketched in the unfinished correspondence, would have been filled in with a firmer hand; justice would have been done to Frederica's sincerity and modesty and her instinctive dislike to Sir James Martin, as well as to Reginald's soft and impressionable but generous character. The author had not got so far as to be in love with her creatures, but there are traces of a promising tenderness to Frederica. The chief blemish in *Lady Susan* is that the principal character is too odious to be interesting or even probable. A different treatment might have put things in proper proportions, and pointed a moral.

It may be observed that the situation of Frederica a little resembles that of Miss Burney's Evelina.

CHAPTER X

'THE WATSONS'

The Watsons is an unfinished novel, composed, it would appear, during the time when the Austens were still living in Bath. As the water-marks in the original manuscript are 1803 and 1804 it could not have been written before that time; and it may probably be assigned to a period a little later than the first draft of *Pride and Prejudice*. The work shows no sign of immaturity, though it may have been an experiment. It was laid aside, and was never finished nor revised; but there is no reason to suppose that it was finally discarded on its merits, beyond the argument, not a very powerful one, that some of the incidents and some of the characters may have furnished hints for other works. Mrs. Robert Watson, for instance, seems to be a study for Mrs. Elton in *Emma*; Tom Musgrave's relation to Lord Osborne is something like Bingley's to Darcy; and Lord Osborne himself, attracted by Emma and unwilling to be attracted, hanging about her at the ball but not choosing to dance, and always attended by a satellite, has some external resemblance to Darcy.

The plot of the novel can hardly be guessed; but the characters and their relations stand out clear from

the first. If one portion of Jane Austen's genius lay in creation of character, another and a hardly less important portion lay in drawing the relation of her characters to each other, and to their circumstances. She has the whole company in her hand, and knows them even to the outer fringe of acquaintance and neighbourhood, before she pulls the strings and sets them dancing. In the completed works we come at last to know everybody—as *we* know them, that is, not as she did; here we are only introduced to them, and away they go into uncertainty. A bunch of sisters, a group of officers, a couple of parents more interested in themselves than in their sons and daughters, forming a country family neither very highly bred, wealthy, industrious nor contented; a second family, smaller and richer; a shy lord, who overcomes his shyness only to become as sheepish as Marlow in *She Stoops to Conquer*; these are the actors, and there is sufficient variety in the cast—but it is a vain labour to describe people whom we have seen only once and never danced with.

The opening of *The Watsons* is conceived in Jane Austen's best style. Two sisters, one of whom has been brought up away from her family, like Fanny Price, are making each other's acquaintance. Natural affection, mutual confidence, and common interest, in contrast with imperfect knowledge and undiscovered temperaments, give an opportunity which few other writers of fiction would have noticed. Elizabeth, the elder sister, has good qualities, soured by disappointment, narrow means, the paltry incidents of a little town, and sisterly rivalries. Whether she was intended to marry and be prosperous, or to have her better

nature poisoned by a vein of jealousy and starved by penurious celibacy, does not appear. She had not magnanimity enough to struggle with loneliness and poverty in combination. Emma, the younger, has been brought up away from home. Her high spirits, good humour, discrimination of character, and the courage and independence which come with gentle nurture make her, however slightly outlined, a true Austen heroine; not unworthy to stand by the side of the other Emma.

The situation, after a few lines explaining who the personages are, is introduced thus:—[1]

> Miss Emma Watson, who had very recently returned to her family from the care of an aunt who had brought her up, was to make her first public appearance in the neighbourhood; and her eldest sister, whose delight in a ball was not lessened by a ten years' enjoyment, had some merit in cheerfully undertaking to drive her and all her finery in the old chair to D. on the important morning.
>
> As they splashed along the dirty lane, Miss Watson thus instructed and cautioned her inexperienced sister:
>
> 'I daresay it will be a very good ball, and among so many officers you will hardly want partners. . . . I hope you will be in good looks. I should not be surprised if you were thought to be one of the prettiest girls in the room, there is a great deal in novelty.'

And so on.

Another scene is worth transcribing, a ballroom scene, and one of the best of an author who excels in ballroom scenes; the following incident especially, both for its own charm, and because it will remind readers of Jane Austen's affection for her own nieces and nephews, and the fascination which she had for them as the most

[1] *Memoir*, p. 297.

adored of aunts, whatever she may sometimes have thought and said of other people's nieces and nephews.

At the conclusion of the two dances Emma found herself, she knew not how, seated amongst the Osbornes' set; and she was immediately struck with the fine countenance and animated gestures of the little boy [Charles Blake, ten years old and 'uncommonly fond of dancing'] as he was standing before his mother, considering when they should begin.

'You will not be surprised at Charles's impatience,' said Mrs. Blake, a lively, pleasant-looking little woman of five or six and thirty, to a lady who was standing near her, 'when you know what a partner he is to have. Miss Osborne has been so very kind as to promise to dance the two first dances with him.'

'O yes! we have been engaged this week,' cried the boy, 'and we are to dance down every couple.'

On the other side of Emma Miss Osborne, Miss Carr, and a party of young men were standing engaged in very lively consultation; and soon afterwards she saw the smartest officer of the set walking off to the orchestra to order the dance, while Miss Osborne passing before her to her little expecting partner, hastily said, 'Charles, I beg your pardon for not keeping my engagement, but I am going to dance these two dances with Colonel Beresford. I know you will excuse me, and I will certainly dance with you after tea'; and without staying for an answer, she turned again to Miss Carr, and in another minute was led by Colonel Beresford to begin the set. If the little boy's face had in its happiness been interesting to Emma, it was infinitely more so under this sudden reverse; he stood the picture of disappointment, with crimsoned cheeks, quivering lips, and eyes bent on the floor. His mother, stifling her own mortification, tried to soothe his with the prospect of Miss Osborne's second promise; but though he contrived to utter with an effort of boyish bravery, 'O, I do not mind it!' it was very evident by the increasing agitation of his features that he minded it as much as ever.

Emma did not think or reflect; she felt and acted. 'I shall be very happy to dance with you, Sir, if you like it,' said she, holding out her hand with the most unaffected good-humour. The boy in one moment, returned to all his first delight, looked joyfully at his mother, and stepping forward with an honest, simple 'Thank you, ma'am,' was instantly ready to attend his new acquaintance. . . . It was a partnership which could not be noticed without surprise. It gained her a broad stare from Miss Osborne and Miss Carr as they passed her in the dance. 'Upon my word, Charles, you are in luck,' said the former, as she turned to him. 'You have got a better partner than me'; to which the happy Charles answered 'Yes. . . .'[1]

We are not surprised to learn that Emma Watson was intended to refuse Lord Osborne and to marry Mr. Howard, who had brains, agreeable looks, and good manners, though he had presumably no fortune of his own, and, setting aside other inequalities, was 'a little more than thirty.' Behind Mr. Howard's pupil, the sheepish lord, we are conscious of a proud dowager and a family phalanx, and we surmise several of the reasons which made Emma Watson not desire to intrude into the Osborne set, and aim at what the 'novel slang' of the day would have called 'a splendid alliance.'

I have quoted enough to make it appear that *The Watsons* ought not to be put aside as an unfinished work condemned by its author, but well worth attention. I cannot agree with the author of the *Memoir* in thinking that it was allowed to remain unfinished because the circumstances of the heroine's life endangered her refinement. Commonness and refinement do not depend on circumstances, though circumstances may affect them. The Bennets, Mrs. Norris, Sir Walter Elliot, Fanny

[1] Pages 318-320.

Price and her brother William, in their different ways bear witness to this. Emma Watson's gentility could have taken care of itself as well as Fanny Price's or Elizabeth Bennet's.

An unfinished novel, to which the authors of the *Life and Letters* have given the title of *Sanditon*, is described on p. 381 of that work, and more fully in chap. xiii. of the *Memoir*. It was begun in January 1817, and in seven weeks twelve chapters had been written. It contains some promising sketches: but it would be useless, if not impertinent, to pass an opinion on a work so obviously incomplete.

CHAPTER XI

SUMMARY

JANE AUSTEN needs no testimonials; her position is at this moment established on a firmer basis than that of any of her contemporaries. She has completely distanced Miss Edgeworth, Miss Ferrier, Fanny Burney, and Hannah More, writers who eclipsed her modest reputation in her own day. The readers of *Ormond*, *Marriage*, *Evelina*, or *Celebs* are few; but hundreds know intimately every character and every scene in *Pride and Prejudice*. She has survived Trollope and Mrs. Gaskell: one may almost say that she is less out of date than Currer Bell and George Eliot. It was not always so. In 1859 a writer in *Blackwood's Magazine* spoke of her as 'being still unfamiliar in men's mouths' and 'not even now a household word.'

The reason for this comparative obscurity in her own time, compared with her fame at the present day, may in some measure be that in writing, as in other arts, finish is now more highly prized than formerly. But conception as well as finish is in it. The miracle in Jane Austen's writing is not only that her presentment of each character is complete and consistent, but also that every fact and particular situation is viewed in compre-

hensive proportion and relation to the rest. When her imagination walked out in Bath, she took the town with her, all the people in the streets, their looks and their business: she knew where Admiral Croft sauntered, and why Mrs. Croft was not with him; what part of his after-breakfast morning Sir Walter Elliot had reached, and whom he would meet in his walk, whom he would bow to, whom he would shake hands with, whom he and his daughter would ignore; where Mrs. Clay would meet the Elliots, and what use she meant to make of them that afternoon; why Mrs. Smith looked out of the window, and why Anne was hurrying alone to call on her. She knew what every one of her people did yesterday and would do to-morrow, and what had happened, and was going to happen, to make them do it. The topography of Meryton and Highbury was as clear to her as the topography of Bath. Small facts and expressions which pass almost unnoticed by the reader, and quite unnoticed by the other actors in the story, turn up later to take their proper place. She never drops a stitch. The reason is not so much that she took infinite trouble, though no doubt she did, as that everything was actual to her, as in his larger historical manner everything was actual to Macaulay.

Macaulay is often quoted as having compared her to Shakespeare. But Macaulay knew the proportions of things. What he said was, that while Shakespeare 'has left us a greater number of striking portraits than all other dramatists put together, he has hardly left us a single caricature'; and that though 'Shakespeare has had neither equal nor second,' Jane Austen is to be placed among the writers who, in the point noticed above.

'have approached nearest to the manner of the great master.'

Scott did not scruple to write in his diary[1] 'that young lady had a talent for describing the involvements and feelings and characters of ordinary life which is to me the most wonderful I ever met with'; and then follows the well-known 'Big Bow-wow' passage Scott wrote thus 'after reading, and for the third time at least, Miss Austen's very finely written novel of *Pride and Prejudice*.' 'He also wrote, "Edgeworth, Ferrier, Austen, have all given portraits of real society far superior to anything man, vain man, has produced of the like nature"; and "there's a finishing-off in some of her scenes that is really quite above everything else."' He reviewed *Emma* in the *Quarterly* of October 1815[2]; and we know from a note in Lockhart's *Life* that 'Miss Austen's novels, especially *Emma* and *Northanger Abbey*, were great favourites with Scott, and he often read chapters of them to his evening circle.'

Whately was the *Quarterly* critic who as early as 1821 wrote of some of her conversations as comparable to Shakespeare's. 'Like him, she shows as admirable a discrimination in the character of fools as of people of sense; a merit which is far from common.' Tennyson, who said in 1870, 'I think *Persuasion* and *Mansfield Park* are my favourites,' said also, 'the realism and lifelikeness of Miss Austen's *dramatis personæ* come nearest to those of Shakespeare. Shakespeare, however, is a sun, to which Jane Austen, though a bright and true little

[1] Lockhart, iv. 28.

[2] This number was not published till March 1816. *Emma* came out late in December 1815. *Life and Letters*, p. 326.

world, is but an asteroid.' Her later admirers, whether critics, authors, or men and women of the world, are innumerable, and their homage takes the form of unweariedly reading and rereading her books. Her successors, male and female, have acknowledged her genius, and none with warmer and more discriminating praise than Lady Ritchie and Mrs. Oliphant, who describes her as 'a model English girl, simple, and saucy, and fair,' deepening and ripening till she arrives at the conception of Anne Elliot, and giving us on the way pictures of 'amusing and delightful human creatures . . . more worth than the finest sentiments or the most skilful machinery. [1]

Let us hear Andrew Lang, who, in his *Letters to Dead Authors*,[2] addresses Jane Austen thus :—

> What says your best successor? . . . She says, 'Her heroines have a stamp of their own. They have *a certain gentle self-respect and humour and hardness of heart*. . . . Love with them does not mean a passion as much as an interest, deep and silent. . . . Dear books' (we say, with Miss Thackeray——) 'dear books, bright, sparkling with wit and animation, in which the homely heroines charm, the dull hours fly, and the very bores are enchanting.'

Only Charlotte Brontë, who could neither rise nor fall to her level, misconceives her.

It is easier to feel than to estimate a genius which has no parallel. Jane Austen's faults are obvious. Her style is remarkable rather for exquisite choice of words than for skill in composition or distinction of language. Her plots, though worked out with microscopic delicacy,

[1] *Literary History of the Nineteenth Century*, iii. chap. vi.

[2] Page 83.

are not in a high degree original or ingenious; incident is almost absent; she repeats situations, and to some extent even characters. She cared for story and situation only as they threw light on personal character. Her novels make no display of idealism, romance, tenderness, poetry, or religion. Her relation to that side of life is to be sought (and may be found) in what others said of her, and in unobtrusive indications which may be observed here and there between the lines of her private letters and her published works. All this may be conceded, and yet she stands by the side of Molière, unsurpassed among writers of prose and poetry, within the limits which she imposed on herself, for clear and sympathetic vision of human character.

She sees everything in clear outline and perspective. She does not care to analyse by logic what she knows by intuition; she does not search out the grounds of motive like George Eliot, nor illumine them like Meredith by search-light flashes of insight, nor like Hardy display them by irony, sardonic or pitying, nor like Henry James thread a labyrinth of indications and intimations, repulsions and attractions right and left, all leading to the central temple, where sits the problem. She has no need to construct her characters, for there they are before her, like Mozart's music, only waiting to be written down.

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